

# AMAZING

## STORIES

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FEBRUARY 25¢



# ORPHAN OF ATLANS

by WILLIAM LAWRENCE HAMLING

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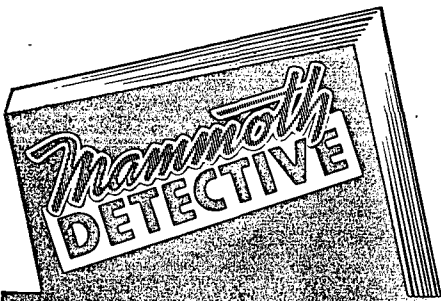


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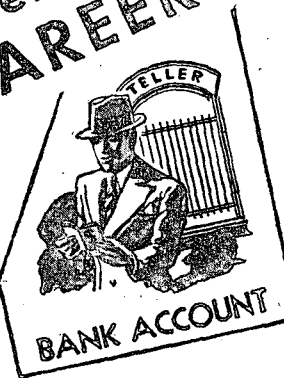
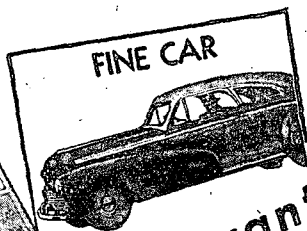
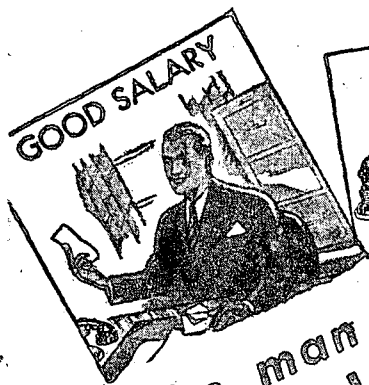
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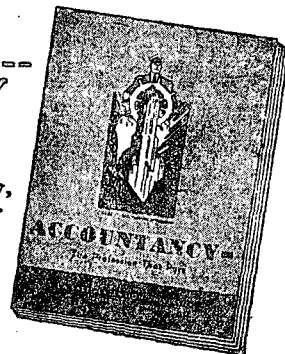
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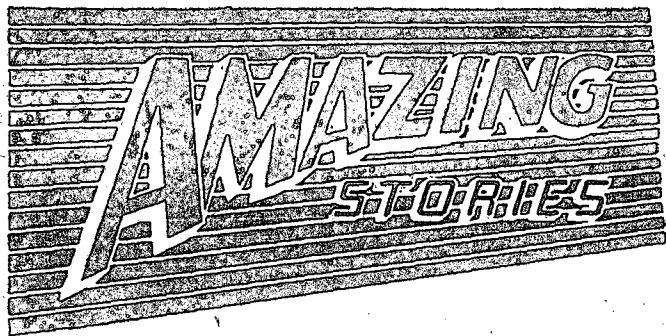
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## ALL STORIES Complete

### ORPHAN OF ATLANS

(Short Novel—33,600) ..... by William Lawrence Hamling 8

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

*The sphere crashed in a Wisconsin pasture. In it was a dying woman and her baby. Who were they?*

BLABBERMOUTH (Novelet—10,000) ..... by Theodore Sturgeon 66

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*She was 'possessed—or so she said—and a little imp whispered to her . . . things she had to repeat!*

### LAND OF THE DAMNED

(Short Novel—33,900) ..... by Berkeley Livingston 86

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*A world hidden away from the sight of the ordinary man, deep beneath the waves of the Pacific.*

THE HOUSE (Short—5,500) ..... by Rog Phillips 140

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

*A haunted house, a witch, her monster son, and a thunderstorm—hardly fit for a maternity ward!*

### CAUTION: DEAD MAN AT WORK

(Short—3,250) ..... by Arthur T. Harris 150

Illustrated by Arnold Kohn

*What happens when we die? Do we know what's going on? And if we did know, would THIS happen?*

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# EXTRAVAGANT FICTION TODAY COLD FACT TOMORROW

FEBRUARY, 1947

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NUMBER 2

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones suggesting a scene from "Orphan of Athens"

AMAZING  
STORIES  
★  
FEBRUARY  
1947

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Volume 21  
Number 2

The

# OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

PERHAPS one of the topnotch writers in New York is Theodore Sturgeon, who now writes his first story for AMAZING STORIES. "Blabbermouth" is a story, based on what Mr. Sturgeon calls the "psychic," but which your editor (and Dr. Rhine) would call ESP (extra-sensory perception). In this sense, Mr. Sturgeon is employing fact; rather than fiction, in his science. "Blabbermouth" is a story of a woman who can sense that which is hidden to most of us, by some mental means; which in itself would make an interesting theme, but coupled with the fact that she couldn't keep her mouth shut about what she sensed—well, you'll find out what a smash story it makes when you read it!

"ORPHAN OF ATLANS" is by William Lawrence Hamling and it brings a new angle into the Atlantis theme, which has been so popular in the past. He postulates that perhaps Atlantis exists in the future rather than in the past—and employs a time machine to get there. The late H. G. Wells' "Time Machine" was perhaps the first of the time travel stories in the modern vein, and we think "Orphan Of Atlans" is the latest and newest and certainly one of the most entertaining and thrilling we've ever read.

AS A contrast we've paced this story with a story of Lemuria, written by Berkeley Livingston, which also sparkles with action and with new concepts of an old theme. "Land Of The Damned" will have you on edge most of the time, and off the edge the rest of it!

ROG PHILLIPS proves he can write a classy "unknown" type yarn with shivers and chills in it with his latest, "The House." It's one of those eerie places you drive up to, in the middle of the night in a thunderstorm and meet the hulking monster and his witch mother in the doorway—except that the matter becomes complicated when your wife expects to have your baby right now! What would you do?

ARTHUR T. HARRIS, espionage expert *par excellence* (in two wars) returns again to his hobby by writing "Caution: Dead Man At Work." It's about a guy who dies, then finds out he's per-

fectedly conscious. His own funeral turns out to be a very interesting one to attend, but doesn't go exactly the way he'd like it to go—so he begins by overturning the hearse!

SOME of our readers asked us "who is Mr. Baring-Gould?" referred to in our January editorial. Well, he's the author of an article called "Little Superman, What Now?" in the September 1946 issue of "Harper's Magazine." It seems Mr. Baring-Gould got to wondering what would happen to the science fiction magazines now that fact had caught up to them. So he proceeded to find out—and to tell the world via *Harpers*. Only thing is he took some very harsh slaps at your favorite magazine, AMAZING STORIES, without checking to see if his information was correct. For instance, he slapped at the Shaver Mystery without knowing what it was all about; and for another opined as how the readers of science fiction numbered 250,000. If he'd check the Audit Bureau of Circulations' published figures for February, 1946, he'd have discovered that the Ziff-Davis science fiction magazines led the field by a terrific margin with a circulation of 261,611—and that AMAZING STORIES, far from being at the "bottom of the list" was way up in front. Let's see those "leaders" print *their* circulation figures, backed up by the ABC! And he arrived at no answer to his title question in spite of the fact that AMAZING STORIES has for two years been presenting the answer in its pages as to "What Now?"

IF THERE are strange changes in the usual format of this magazine, don't be too puzzled. Attribute it to "mechanical difficulties."

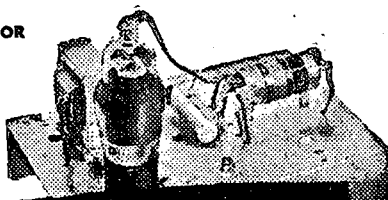
ALSO, if you didn't find your favorite, Richard S. Shaver, in this issue, it's because the deros have been working hard to botch up the publication of AMAZING STORIES. If it isn't the deros, we're darned if we know what to blame! Maybe it's because there was a Friday the thirteenth in September, or we walked under a ladder. But we're not superstitious, so we'd rather believe it's deros in our hair. Anyway, Dick will be back with some of the finest yarns you've ever seen, and the Shaver Mystery will present some new and baffling information.—*Rap*.





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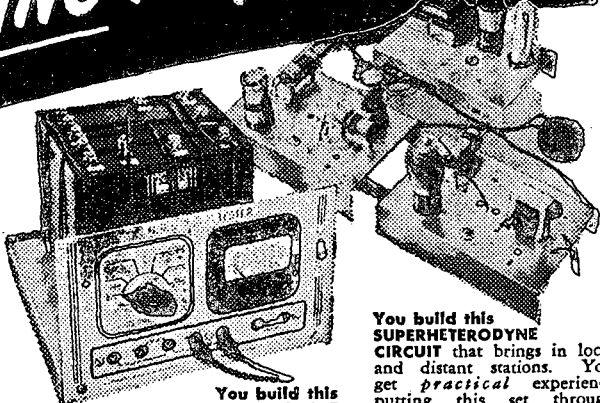
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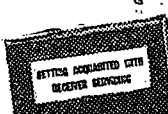
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As the shimmering ball spun lower, a sound grew in the night



# ORPHAN of ATLANS

By WILLIAM LAWRENCE HAMLING

**Was Atlantis really in the Past? Could it be that Time is not what we think, and that it really exists in what is to be our Future?**

## PROLOGUE

**I**T CAME out of nowhere in the middle of the night. It hovered, a shimmering ball of metal, like an over-inflated toy balloon in the still Wisconsin air. The moon, peeping from behind scudding cloudbanks, caught it in silvery rays, looked at it unbelieving, and hurried back behind the protecting clouds.

It spun lower with ever increasing speed. And as it spun, a sound grew in the night. It was a whining sobbing sound that rose in a crescendo.

A rabbit, bounding lightly over the length of a cornfield, heard it. Its ears straightened, and its furry body trem-

bled in fear. It scurried deeper into the corn and huddled shivering in the shadows.

A hawk, circling in lazy whirls high in the stillness of the night, saw and heard it. Its wings flapped in terrified movements as it dove swiftly for the cover and protection of a nearby woods.

A dog in a barnyard lifted its muzzle into the sky and moaned. Cattle in a barn close by, contentedly munching in their stalls, began to low. Chickens, asleep on their roosts, awoke and added their protest to the dirge.

The crescendo rose. An astral siren



of sound.

Karl Maddox, B.Sc., graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Wisconsin, heard the sound as he sat thumbing through his Master's Thesis in the parlor of his farm home. He had been contemplating the shock his thesis would produce upon the "stupid dolts" who served as *Science Professors* at the University. He hated them as he hated the rest of humanity. They were all stupid, groping inferiors—to him. The sound grew around him. He rose frowning from his chair, laid his manuscript on a table and hurried into the hall. From upstairs came a grunting mumble as other members of the household stirred.

He opened the front door and moved out onto the porch. "Can't be a lynx—"

Behind him, his father, a grayed man in his sixties, in bedroom slippers and hastily lashing a bathrobe around him, slammed out on the porch.

"What the devil's going on?"

Karl Maddox heard his father grumble as he hurried down the porch steps. Then together they stood in the yard.

Over by the barn they could see Prince, the Collie, straining at his leash, his muzzle lifted into the night. Then their eyes drifted upward.

It spun in dizzy circles over the barn, a mass of shimmering metal. And as it spun, lower, closer, in ever increasing speed, the whining sob of it grew.

"My God, Karl—what in heaven's name—"

"It's out of control—it's going to crash!"

"What is it, Karl—what—"

Lower, spinning, closer, shrieking, it hurtled downward.

"It's going to hit the barn!"

But it didn't. A sudden twist, a movement too rapid for the eye to follow, and it veered away out over the

cornfield. One last dizzy loop of motion. One final protesting whine.

It hit the ground. They felt the thudding impact as the earth shuddered beneath them. Then came silence.

They stood mutely for eternal seconds. Their mouths were open, their eyes dazed with awe. Then, even before they realized it, they were running across the barnyard, out into the cornfield.

THE Moon peeped out now. Fearfully it looked down, ready to flee behind its scudding clouds. But there was nothing to fear—now. The rabbit stopped its shivering in the corn and stared stupidly at the cracked and broken mass of metal a short distance away. It waited, tense and watchful beside a cornstalk. It heard a sudden moan rising from the twisted hulk. Then it saw movement as a figure, clutching something small and wailing in its arms, crawled slowly from the wreck. The rabbit scampered off.

The two men were panting when they reached the scene. For long moments they stood stark and still in the shattered corn, staring.

"Good Lord, what a mess. . . ."

Karl Maddox agreed silently with his father. He looked at the broken mass of metal burrowed deeply into the ground.

They heard a soft moan. Their eyes glanced swiftly down among the cornstalks strewn the earth. Karl Maddox gasped:

"It's a woman! A woman and a child!"

He ran forward, knelt swiftly beside a huddled figure, clasping a softly wailing body in lacerated arms.

She was very close to death, Karl Maddox knew, even as he looked at her. Blood was a scarlet froth seeping from



her body into the ground. But even so, she was very beautiful. She was slim, youthful, with raven hair and pale life ebbing features. Her eyes lifted painfully to his, then fell to the child held close against her breast.

"Jon—my baby—Jon. . . ."

The words sounded alien in Karl Maddox's ears. He wanted to help her, but didn't know what to do. He could see death reaching out for her as she struggled to speak.

He glanced at the child. It was a boy. A boy of possibly four or five years. He had tawny blonde hair and was struggling in his mother's arms.

"Baltu—oh Baltu. . . ."

He listened to the words bubble in her lips. He tried to soothe the ache of pain from her forehead with his hand. She was trying to speak again.

"Vartha—he—responsible. . . ."

She was dead. Karl Maddox knew it. Behind him he could hear the shudder that left his father's throat. Then he was loosening the woman's grasp from the child.

It waited in his arms. He rose, holding it tight against him. He could see his father looking helplessly at the child.

"Karl—look! His shoulder!"

Karl Maddox glanced down at the boy. A strange silvery material covered his body. At the shoulders it was ripped and torn with red scratches seeping tiny dribblets of blood. Below the child's left shoulder was a strange mark. It might have been a tattoo. It might have been a birthmark. Karl Maddox only knew that it was a tiny flaming sword with a halo of gold around it.

He could hear his father speaking. But he didn't listen. His eyes were once again fastened on the now silent wreck. A mass of metal, a silver globe, that had come hurtling out of the sky.

What was it? Where did it come from? Karl Maddox wanted to know.

## CHAPTER I

JON MADDOX walked slowly up the cobble-stone walk to the Administration building. Around him the University Campus was alive with laughter and young voices. The spring term was over; it was a time for fun.

Jon however, didn't feel the care-free spirit of his classmates. He felt only the mental relaxation of four hard years of study. The fact that he had graduated with top honors stirred him little. He was wondering at the moment why Dean Phillips had called him over to his office.

He entered the solemn quiet of the building and walked straight to the Dean's office. A Secretary looked up from her typewriter.

"Oh, it's you Mister Maddox. The Dean is expecting you."

Jon nodded to her and walked past her desk to a glazed glass door with bronzed lettering: Dean Phillips.

"Hello, Jon, come in."

Jon closed the door softly behind him. He walked slowly across the room, a square stuffy space of book-cases, overstuffed furniture, and pictures of Washington, Lincoln, and Roosevelt hanging from the walls.

He walked up to a large walnut desk. "You wanted to see me, sir?"

Dean Phillips waved a thin hand toward a chair. He was a small wrinkled man with pince-nez glasses that seemed to have bitten holes through the delicate bridge of his nose. His hair, what remained of it, was short, wiry and white.

"Sit down, Jon," he said.

Jon sank slowly into a leather lounge chair opposite the desk. He remained quietly waiting.

The Dean fumbled with his glasses and sat back peering over the top of them. "I suppose you're wondering why I sent for you."

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Hmm. Well, to tell you the truth Jon, I have an offer to make you."

"An offer? I don't understand."

The Dean sniffed delicately. "I've been keeping a close tab on you Jon, ever since you matriculated four years ago. Your—father—gave me implicit instructions to watch your progress. He wanted you to be a physicist."

"My father," Jon emphasized the word, "is a great scientist himself."

"Hmm. Yes. . . ."

"You were saying?"

Dean Phillips leaned forward clasping his fingers on the desk. "As I started to say, I've watched you. You have an alert, adaptive mind, and, I believe, have applied yourself wholeheartedly to your work here. Your record proves that."

"I came here to study, sir."

"Hmm. Yes. . . . The fact of the matter is, Jon, that I want you to stay on here. There will be a vacancy in the physics department sometime this fall, and—"

"I'm sorry, sir. I appreciate your offer, but I have other plans."

The Dean pursed his lips thoughtfully and sat back again, gently tapping the desk with his fingers.

"I don't mean to pry into your personal affairs, Jon, but may I ask just what your plans are?"

Jon brushed a wave of tawny blond hair back. His eyes were gray and steady on the Dean. "I plan to assist my father in his experiments."

"Hmm. I see. Are you aware of the nature of these—experiments?"

"Not exactly, sir. I do know that he sent me to school for that purpose however. He never talked a great deal

about his work."

"Hmm. What did he talk about?"

Jon frowned. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

DEAN PHILLIPS leaned forward abruptly. "Look here, Jon, you have every right to call me a prying old fool—if you wish, but Karl Maddox is an old friend of mine. He was a student under me here at Wisconsin, just as you were these past years. I probably know Karl as well as any man alive."

"What are you trying to say?"

"I was wondering if Karl talked about—you."

"Why should he talk about me?"

The Dean sighed. "You're not making this very easy for me, Jon. You do of course realize that Karl Maddox is not your real parent."

Jon nodded, the frown increasing on his face. "Naturally I realize it. My parents were killed in a plane crash."

"It wasn't a plane."

Jon straightened. His features grew tense. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that the experiments that Karl Maddox is connecting have very much to do with your—past. Have you ever seen the remains of a metal sphere in his laboratory?"

"Yes I have." Jon replied slowly. "It was one of his earlier experiments that failed, wasn't it?"

Dean Phillips shook his head. "It may have been an experiment. Whether it failed or not is a moot question. But it had nothing to do with Karl Maddox, either way. It did concern—you."

Jon sat for a long silent moment. "Me?" he said at last.

"Your parents were not killed in a plane crash, Jon. Nearly twenty years ago a strange metal sphere hurtled out of the night and crashed in the Maddox



farm. A woman and a baby boy were inside that sphere. The woman died moments after the crash. The boy lived. Who he was, or where he came from remains a mystery today. You are that boy, Jon."

Jon Maddox grew aware that he was staring incredulously at the Dean. Vague, nebulous thoughts struggled to come forward in his mind. He remembered now the evasions Karl Maddox had always given him about his past—simply that his parents had been killed in a plane crash, that after it, Maddox hadn't wanted the baby to go to an orphanage. He grew conscious of the strange mark on his left shoulder, the blazing sword with the halo of gold. *That* had never been explained. And other things—childish fancies he had been told—ephemeral scenes of tall palace like buildings, of strange beautiful gardens filled with a myriad wavering flower banks. And two laughing children playing among the flowers—a little girl with raven hair and bright blue eyes—and himself . . .

He stirred, aware that the Dean was watching him closely.

"How did you know about—this?" Jon's voice was tense.

"It happened at the same time that Karl submitted his Master's Thesis. He told me the story, that it was his theory the sphere was a space ship from Mars or Venus, that he planned to adopt you, and eventually rebuild the sphere, and—"

"Why have you told me all this?"

THE Dean's features hardened.

"Because I sense in you a keen scientific mind. You would have great possibilities here at the University. I don't want to see you waste months—possibly years on the same problem that has frustrated your—father."

"You don't think very much of his

work."

"Frankly, no. Karl Maddox has always been a man set apart from his fellow colleagues. He has a burning ambition to make a name for himself in the scientific world. He might very well have done so if he had taken my advice years ago. As it is he has wasted the greater part of his life on a futile project. I don't want to see you make the same mistake."

Jon stared for a long silent moment at the Dean. His features were strangely pale, his eyes feverish. "Am I—different from other people?" he suddenly asked.

"Different?"

"You say I survived the crash of an alien sphere. You hint of a space ship from Mars or Venus . . ."

The Dean sighed. "I never said the sphere was *alien*. I also only mentioned your father's theory concerning it. I personally have no such fantastic opinions—"

"Why are they fantastic? Why didn't you offer to help investigate it?"

"I did try. I told Karl to have the machine brought here. He refused, saying it was his discovery. For nearly two decades now he has been working alone on the farm he inherited, as you of course know. And his time has brought nothing but failure. I don't want you to follow the same path. I'm offering you a chance most graduates would jump at, I—"

"It's no use, sir," Jon replied, rising.

Dean Phillips sat back adjusting his glasses. His face had a tired expression. "You're making a great mistake, Jon."

"Maybe I am sir, but I could never be satisfied—now."

. . . Outside the cool afternoon breeze whispered around him. Jon Maddox walked hurriedly across the campus. There was still time to catch the after-

noon train. He wanted to get home. Home . . . Was it home? Could he ever call any place home? Fleeting visions of flowers crossed his mind. Flowers and the laughing tinkle of a raven haired little girl. Unconsciously his hand touched his left shoulder. He could almost feel the mark burning into his hand . . .

**"PHILLIPS** is a fool! He meddles in things that are none of his business!"

Karl Maddox glared angrily across the room. Jon was pouring brandy from a long necked bottle into small tumblers. "I had to find out sometime," he said quietly.

"I know! I wanted to tell you myself! What do you think I've been doing all these years—I've been waiting for the day when you could join me in my research—I was going to explain the whole business! But no, Phillips had to set himself up as a confessor! He's been insanely jealous—he and the rest of the stupid dolts pushing theory across a blackboard! They'd be only too glad to share in my discovery!"

Jon looked up sharply. "Discovery?" he asked.

"Exactly. I made up my mind twenty years ago that I would solve the mystery of the sphere. I have."

Jon took a deep breath. "You mean you *know* where it came from?"

"I do." Karl Maddox replied, his eyes alight with triumph.

"Then Dean Phillips was right," Jon said lowly.

"Phillips?"

"Yes—about the space ship theory of Mars and—"

"Space ship!" Karl Maddox laughed. I only told Phillips that to keep him and the other fools guessing! The sphere didn't come out of space—it came out of time!"

"Time?" Jon dropped his glass to the floor. It broke in a shower of tiny sounds.

Maddox glanced angrily at him. "What's the matter with you? There was no reason to break that glass!"

Jon flushed. "I'm sorry—it was what you said." He brushed his blond hair back with nervous fingers. Do you mean that *I* came out of time?"

"There's no other possibility."

"But—but how can you be sure?"

Kary Maddox scowled. "I expected something more than doubt from you, Jon. Apparently Phillips has succeeded in prejudicing you against me."

"You're not being fair, Dad." Jon said heatedly. "Nobody has tried to turn me against you—nobody could! You forget that I've had somewhat of a shock today—in what Phillips told me about my past, and now you—"

Maddox shrugged. "I suppose that's true. But you also forget that I've had twenty years to study and rebuild the sphere. I'm positive it came out of time because of the mechanism and forces involved."

"What mechanisms?" Jon's voice was tense.

Maddox set his empty glass down on a table and motioned to Jon. "Come along out to the laboratory. I'll show you."

Jon followed eagerly. Out in the cool night he felt better. He realized that his head had been spinning. It was one thing to be the foster child of a well known scientist. It was quite another to be suddenly told that the world he had come to know was not his own. A raven haired vision sped through his mind again.

**THEY** walked swiftly across the farm yard. Jon stared intently at the barn. Outside it had much the same

appearance as any of countless similar barns in the neighborhood. But he knew the inside had been converted into a modern laboratory.

Maddox opened the door for him.

It hadn't changed much since the previous year. Jon saw the same white calcimined walls, the tiers of shelves, the scattered electrical equipment, but in the center of the barn was something that hadn't been there the year before.

It was the sphere. But no longer a wrecked mass of twisted metal rusting in a crude leanto behind the barn. It was a whole, silvery globe, towering toward the roof of the barn.

"Well?"

Jon glanced behind him. Karl Maddox was standing with his arms folded, his grayed hair shimmering in the fluorescent lights, his eyes triumphant.

"You did all this in a year—by yourself?" Jon asked incredulously.

Maddox stepped forward dropping his arms. "The final assembling was purely a mechanical process. I had the plans complete, every detail exact as far as I could determine from my years of study. The work of repairing I left to metal workers from Wausau. It is finished."

Jon walked slowly up to the sphere. Somewhere in the dim vagueness of his mind he sensed that he had walked up to a sphere in much the same manner a long time ago. But it was a fleeting sensation, gone almost as quickly as it had sprung up.

"You were going to explain it to me." Jon turned to the older man.

Maddox nodded, leading the way up a short ramp. Jon followed and stood inside the metal globe with a strange feeling pounding deep inside him. It was a feeling as if he had suddenly found a part of himself, as if he had returned to—

"The key to the motivating power lies

within this glassite shell." Karl Maddox was standing in the center of the oval shaped interior beside a dome-like projection rising from the floor of the sphere. The outside was a transparent glass. Inside Jon saw spiraling coils of wire, complex helixes, and in the center, what appeared to be a gyroscopic mechanism. The rest of the interior of the globe Jon took in with a swift glance. There was a panel of dials and switches in one part of the curving wall, and two padded leather seats with straps hanging loosely down their sides.

"Are you listening, Jon?"

JON focused his gaze on his foster parent. Karl Maddox was glancing impatiently at him.

"I'm listening."

"Very well. You asked me before how I was sure this machine came out of time and not from space. The answer lies here." He tapped the glassite dome beside him. "A space ship would have to be powered by any of a number of combustible fuels, whether it be utilized rocket power, or some sort of atomic disintegration.

"For a great while I was puzzled about this fact. For there was no such means of power utilized. The entire system was electrical in nature. I hit on the key when I studied the gyroscopic mechanism. I asked myself what possible use such a mechanism could be put to. The answer was so simple it should have been obvious from the start. It was used to balance and counteract disrupted electrical forces!—Do you follow me?"

Jon nodded frowning. "But what kind of electrical forces?"

"I asked myself the same question. If this ship had come from space, why would electrical forces be utilized? There was only one answer. The forces utilized were those separating the space



time continuum! Since space can be considered to be electrical in nature, and time itself nothing more than the so-called fourth dimension, a disruption of forces governing the continuum would automatically throw the disrupting mechanism into time!"

The frown increased on Jon's face. "But the gyroscope."

"I was coming to that," Maddox interrupted him. "The gyroscopic control prevented destruction of the machine while the space-warp acted upon it. It served as a balance against the power of twisting electrical forces created by the helix disrupter."

"It's a little over my head," Jon sighed. "They didn't teach us *that* at the University."

Karl Maddox sneered. "The fools don't know enough to teach! After my experiment they'll come crawling to me!"

Jon stared at him. "Experiment?" The word sounded hollow.

The older man nodded. "Of course. Why do you think I've spent a good part of my life rebuilding this machine? Why do you think I adopted you, raised you as my own son? If it hadn't been for that fool Phillips sticking his nose in, I would have been able to tell you myself. Just before your mother died in my arms she uttered a number of words, with names—yours among them. One of them was Baltu, another Vartha. Do they mean anything to you?"

Jon stood still and quiet. The names rang in his mind. Baltu . . . Vartha . . . Vague whisperings arose inside him but he couldn't catch them. For long moments he tried. But it was useless. Only the fleeting vision of raven hair, flowers, and tinkling laughter were there. Nothing else.

"No." His voice sounded dull and tired. "They don't . . ."

Maddox shrugged. "They don't now,

but they may soon. There was a reason for this sphere hurtling through time. Why did it contain only a woman and a child—and that child you? I must know!"

"Why you?" Jon asked quietly, watching his foster father's face. There was a strange expression there, a look he had never seen before.

"Why—for you, of course. Now that you realize how you happened to appear—here."

THE words were suddenly lost on Jon. A burning fire had started within him. A blaze that had started in the Dean's office, that had built up from a faint smoldering spark. He wanted to know—he had to!

"When will we be able to—start?"

Karl Maddox folded his arms. "Now."

"Now?" Jon stared uncertainly around him.

"I made the final adjustments a week ago. I was only waiting for you to return."

"But if what you say is true, which way in time will we go?"

A faint frown creased Karl Maddox's forehead. "That is the only thing I am uncertain of. I am relying on the original builder of the machine for direction. We will only know after we arrive. Well?"

A cold feeling came over Jon. Did they dare risk such an experiment? While he had every confidence in his foster parent's scientific capabilities, there was always a chance he might have made a mistake in re-constructing the machine. . . . No, he couldn't back out. There was something he had to know. Raven hair fluttered in his mind.

"I'm ready," he said.

"Good! There's only one thing left to do. Wait here."

Karl Maddox hurried down the

ramp of the sphere. Jon saw him hurry over to a switch box on one side of the barn. There was a rumbling sound coming from overhead. Jon knew the roof of the barn was opening. Moments later Maddox rejoined him in the sphere. He went immediately to the panel of switches. He threw one of them. There was a clanging sound.

Jon turned and watched a section of metal slide smoothly into place obscuring the opening of the sphere. Then he was aware that Karl Maddox was looking at him.

"Ready? You're not afraid?"

"I'm not afraid."

Maddox manipulated switches. A soft hum grew in the sphere.

"Strap yourself in one of these seats." Maddox ordered.

Jon obeyed. Beside him, Karl Maddox followed suit.

Time stood still then. And the hum grew. It rose in a steady dirge of sound. And with it a strange feeling came over Jon. He knew that this had happened to him once before . . .

There was a sudden lurch. A feeling of floating. Jon guessed that the globe had risen from the floor of the barn. He watched with sweat beading his forehead as Maddox turned another switch on the panel.

"Now," he said hoarsely.

A whining, sobbing sound split the air. It rose in a crescendo. With it came a spinning, twisting sensation. Metal groaned, twisted in agony. There was a sharp explosive sound. Jon was thrown forward against the straps. Blood pounded in his brain. And momentarily consciousness left him . . .

## CHAPTER II

IT seemed that only seconds had elapsed when Jon felt conscious-

ness return to him. The first thing he noticed was the absence of the twisting clash of metal. Another sound had taken its place. It was a buzzing hum coming from inside the sphere. He turned his head and stared at the glassite dome. In the center of the coils and helixes, the gyroscopic mechanism was straining madly.

"Jon—you all right?"

Jon turned his head again. Karl Maddox was shaking his head and straightening against the straps of the chair.

"I'm all right. But what happens now?"

"We keep our fingers crossed," Karl Maddox replied grimly. He reached over to the control panel and flicked a switch.

Jon heard a scraping of metal. Then suddenly daylight poured into the globe. The door of the sphere had slid open.

"Look!" Jon gasped.

The sphere was rocking in the air high above a city. The gleam of metal buildings flashed in the sun. And Jon stared unbelieving. *The sun! Just a few short minutes ago they had left the Maddox farm in the middle of the night!*

"It's a city, Jon—it's a city!"

Jon heard the older man speaking. But he was already aware of the city. And somehow it didn't seem alien to him—the gleaming spires, the girding wall encircling it. His eyes swept through the narrow opening of the sphere on beyond the city below. Hills rose on sloping grass plains to dark forests beyond. He could see the silver ribbon of a river winding down from the hills toward the city.

Around them, suddenly, the buzzing hum roared. Jon turned anxiously.

Karl Maddox was staring at the glassite dome. "The gyroscope—

something's wrong!"

The sphere gave a sudden lurch. Jon felt his stomach jump. He glanced toward the door. They were falling!

The ground was rushing up at them with a shriek of wind. Jon watched horrified as they headed for the center of the city—toward a towering building with gleaming courts.

"We'll be killed." Jon shouted. "Can't you stop it!"

Karl Maddox was working frantically with the switch panel. The sphere slowed slightly, but began spinning.

Everything after that was a kaleidoscope of sound and movement. Jon's senses swam as the spinning sphere whirled in slowing circles toward the ground below. Around him a shrieking of sounds cut into his brain. It was as if the world had suddenly gone crazy.

Then there was a crash, thundering echoes, and oblivion . . .

**J**ON became aware of voices. He felt hands touch his body. The sounds grew louder, the sense of touch more acute. He opened his eyes.

He was lying on the floor of the sphere. Somehow the straps that had held him to the chair were broken. He felt aches and bruises covering his body. He felt sick.

The hands were touching him again. He looked up. One side of the sphere had cracked open like an eggshell. With the light streaming through it like broken sunbeams, Jon knew two things. First, they had crashed and he was alive. Second, that strange men, in strange clothing, and holding long gleaming sword like weapons, were fussing about over him.

One of them saw his eyes open, staring. He flicked the sword at Jon's chest. Jon felt a terrible shock, as if he had been struck by electricity. He

groaned.

"Get up! Get on your feet!"

Dimly Jon heard the command. He rose painfully from the floor, and stood swaying lightly on his feet, for the first time noticing Karl Maddox standing silently off to one side, closely guarded by two of the strange men.

Jon took a moment to study them. They were clad in a strange metallic like material that covered them from the neck down. A wide plastic belt girdled them at the waist, from which hung long scabbards for the weapons they now held.

The sphere itself, as Jon took it in at a glance, was cracked and broken. When he looked over at his foster father, Karl Maddox had a puzzled look of fury and defeat on his face.

Jon felt another tingling shock sweep through him. One of the strange men was prodding him with the tip of a sword. Anger swept through Jon. He started to step forward. The sword flicked at him again. This time the shock nearly threw him back on his heels. It was electricity—there was no question about it!

"You will stand perfectly still." Jon heard the man say.

Across from him, Jon heard Karl Maddox storming angrily.

"What is the meaning of this? Who are you people?"

Jon heard a ringing chorus of laughter. But the eyes that stared steadily at them were not humorous. One of the strangers stepped forward suddenly. He was a swaggering, blustering fellow, and for the first time, Jon noticed that his clothing was different from the others, different in color. While the others were clad in silvery material, this man had solid green. His sword scabbard too was different. The others were plain; his was gold encrusted.

He motioned to one of the guards.



Karl Maddox was shoved forward beside Jon. The green clad man looked coldly at them.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Leader Frav of the Imperial Guard. And now, from which Atlan guerilla base have you come?"

Jon stared blankly. Beside him he heard Karl Maddox whisper: "*Atlan?*"

The guard blustered. "You don't have to act surprised! Either tell me the exact location of your guerilla forces now, or later you won't be able to speak!"

Jon could read the hidden menace behind those words. But strangely, it left him unmoved. There was something else, something that was trying to push forward in his mind. It wasn't that he knew this place or these men—but he felt that sometime he *had* known . . .

A GUARD came running up, his face flushed and breathless. He waited impatiently until Frav turned toward him. Low words were exchanged that Jon couldn't catch. Then suddenly the green clad Leader turned back to them. There was a sneer on his rough features.

"Whatever plan you and your Atlan scum had planned hasn't worked. Had you told me what I wanted to know I would have given you a quick death. But it is out of my hands now. The Atlord Ogar himself will deal with you!"

Who the Atlord Ogar was, and exactly what he meant to do with them was lost for the moment upon Jon. The guards, with Frav at their head, had led them from the crumpled remains of the sphere. In one corner of his thoughts, Jon was wondering how they had ever come out of the wreck alive. But it was only a fleeting thought, pushed aside.

They were in an immense courtyard. Flagstone walls rose on all sides for more than thirty feet. An immense palace of marble and granite, with gleaming metal spires, rose before them. Off to one side of the courtyard was a latticed network of spidery metal forming an archway for an extensive garden. Through breaks in what appeared to be lilac bushes, Jon caught a glimpse of myriads of flowers—and something else.

She must have been standing close to the lattice-work—watching. Jon caught a sudden glimpse of motion as she moved, swiftly away along a curving path. He saw a slim body as perfect as a blossomed rose shrouded in a silvery garment. He saw flashing legs and heard the quick patter of her feet along the stone path. And he saw a wealth of raven hair . . .

Something pricked in his back. A shock swept through him. He whirled angrily.

One of the guards was holding a sword pointed straight at him. "Move!" he ordered.

Jon managed to curb his feelings and obeyed. Inwardly he knew there was no other choice. But he couldn't help wondering what it was all about. Why were they suddenly looked on as enemies? Whose enemies? Who were the Atlan guerillas Frav had mentioned? Who was the Atlord Ogar? And most of all, Jon saw again that fleeting figure in the garden. Dim visions surged up from the bottom of his mind.

"Through here!"

Jon became aware of his surroundings. They were entering the building on the far side of the courtyard, through a pillared archway. Karl Maddox was walking ahead of him, and Jon could see him slowly clenching and unclenching his fists. Jon

could guess what was going on in the older man's mind, the bitter anger and frustration at the way things were turning out. Guards flanked them on both sides, and further ahead he could see the blustering swagger of Frav as he took the lead.

It seemed as if they walked for miles. There were long corridors with numerous doors on either side, all of them closed, and armed guards standing before them. Whoever the Atlord Ogar was, Jon decided he was afraid of something—or somebody.

Up ahead Jon saw Frav suddenly stop before a huge oaken portal. Two armed sentries clicked their heels as he approached. Then one of them had the door open, and Frav walked through.

AS JON entered the room, his pulse quickened. Everything about him shone and glittered. The floor, a mosaic pastel of inlaid marble slabs, seemed imbued with all the colors of a rainbow. The walls were richly adorned with gold and silver tapestries. The ceiling, a domed expanse of glistening metal, held a huge sword in brilliant bas-relief. Unconsciously Jon raised his hand to his left shoulder. With but one exception the sword on the ceiling was an exact duplicate. Where the halo of gold should have been wreathing the hilt, there was nothing. Nothing but a dark blotch that might have been paint. Paint that could have obliterated such a halo.

Jon's eyes swept down the ceiling to the sword point. Directly beneath it, rising from the marble floor, was a dais. On the dais was a throne. A man was sitting on it, watching them approach.

He was a huge hulking person, sitting hunched forward, one elbow thrown carelessly over a mucle knee. He had a large broad forehead with two black

piercing eyes sticking out beneath it. His hair was black and close cut, his nose straight and long, his chin what could have been a square piece of granite. He must have had lips, but Jon couldn't see them. Just a tight wide line that served as his mouth, and the teeth behind were clamped together.

He wore a short red satiny cape draped over his broad shoulders. The rest of his body was clad in the strange metallic material Jon had noticed on the guards. A short jeweled scabbard hung from a gold encrusted belt. Taken all at once he looked like a gladiator out of the dust of ancient Rome, ready to leap upon his victim.

Frav, John saw, had reached the edge of the dais. He was bowing slightly, and saying words that came only as a low mumble. This then, was the Atlord Ogar.

Ogar waved the green-clad Leader away and John felt himself undergoing a close scrutiny. The guards had fallen away from them, Jon noticed, and they stood alone in the center of the chamber facing the dais.

"Come closer."

The two words boomed out of the sudden silence like cracks from a whip. Jon looked quickly at Karl Maddox. The older man shrugged. "Let me do the talking," he whispered.

They advanced. Jon looked steadily at Ogar. He saw the piercing black eyes of the man flicking between them. They stopped a few feet from the dais.

Jon had to look up now toward the throne. He could see that behind it a door was set in the stone wall of the room. It was ajar.

"Where did you get that machine?"

Jon's attention focused on Ogar. He noticed the slow deliberate way the words had been carefully spoken. There had been no preamble as to who they were or where they came

from. He wondered why.

Across from Jon, Karl Maddox had folded his arms. He was staring arrogantly up at the Atlord. "I built it," Jon heard him say.

A frown crossed the wide forehead. Black eyes centered on Karl Maddox. "You built it? What is your name?"

Jon relaxed slightly. That was one question he had been waiting to hear. Karl Maddox was already speaking.

"My name is Karl Maddox, I'm a physicist. This is my foster son, Jon. And now if you don't mind I'd like to know a few things myself. First, where are we? Second, what year is this? And third, why have we been accosted in this manner?"

JON was intently watching the man on the throne. From somewhere in the dim recesses of his mind he knew that he had had seen that face before. Now however, he was watching the startled expression clouding the already heavy features. "Then it is true! The machine *does* work!" The words slipped out in a low mumble. Jon heard them, half doubting his ears. He watched as the Atlord leaned further forward, a cunning look entering his eyes.

"I shall be glad to answer your questions. You are in Atlan City, in the palace of the Atlord—you are speaking to him now. My name is Ogar Vartha. The year is 5000 A. C. You are not being accosted—in a sense, yet. . . ."

Jon started so suddenly that the Atlord switched his gaze to him. A word was ringing in Jon's mind. It fled suddenly from his lips.

"Vartha . . ."

The Atlord stiffened. "Yes? Does my name mean anything to—you?"

Jon turned to Karl Maddox. He could read a warning in the older man's eyes. Almost a command. But Jon

was beyond that point. Too many things had happened, were happening. And memory was struggling within him.

"My mother . . . You said my mother mentioned that name. . . ."

Karl Maddox flushed angrily. "You young fool—let me do the talking!"

Resentment rose inside Jon. He stared blankly at his foster parent. But Karl Maddox was no longer looking at him. He was gazing up at the Atlord. Jon turned his head slowly.

His eyes met a cold steady stare. Ogar Vartha was looking at him with a silent intensity, much as a snake might gaze at an audience from behind a glass case. Beside him, Jon heard Karl Maddox speak.

"Did I understand you to say this is—Atlan City? Does that name have anything to do with Atlantis?"

The Atlord ignored him. He continued to stare at Jon. "You mentioned something about my name—who was your mother?"

Jon faltered. What could he say? Had Karl Maddox been right in following the path of the original sphere? Was this truly the land of his home? Something told him it was. But something else, it might have been the look on the Atlord's face, told him to be careful.

"I don't know . . ." Jon said slowly.

"You don't know?" There was mockery now in Vartha's voice. He turned questioningly to Karl Maddox. "Maybe you know."

Maddox sighed. "Some twenty years ago a sphere crashed on my Wisconsin farm. A woman and a child were in it. The woman died. I raised the child and rebuilt the sphere. . . ."

Jon was aware of two things at once. The Atlord had stiffened on his throne as if someone had suddenly



slammed a great weight against him. And behind the throne, the door which Jon had noticed before, swung open. A girl stepped onto the dais and stood beside the Atlord.

SHE was tall and graceful, her body molded perfectly into a shimmering silver garment that stopped reluctantly above smooth rounded knees. Her eyes were bright blue, her lips quivering and red. And her hair. . . .

Jon's senses whirled. A vision stirred before him of a flowery garden, two laughing children playing among the flowers, a little girl with raven hair and bright blue eyes . . . And a name swept up from the past, swept through his mind and fled like a startled deer from his lips.

"Geryl. . . ."

She was staring at him. Her eyes were wide, shocked, and awe-struck. A gasp left her. Her hand fluttered tremulously across her lips. Then she was speaking, her voice a bewildered sound, her eyes fastened upon him.

"Uncle—it is him! It is—"

Through a daze Jon heard Vartha shout a harsh command. Beside him he could hear Karl Maddox breathing nervously. Then he was suddenly aware of men moving behind him.

Jon whirled. The guards, with Frav at their head, were rushing down on them. Even as they came Jon saw them tugging at their sword scabbards.

There was no time to think. Only one thing was certain. Something had happened that threatened their lives. Jon gave a single quick glance at Karl Maddox. He saw grim anger, and defiance. Then Jon dove forward.

The move caught the closest guard by surprise. John hit him at the knees, his fist crashing upward in the same instant. Then man crumpled and Jon felt teeth and bone give under his hand.

He hit the floor.

Even as he struck the marble surface, Jon rolled. His body struck another guard, tripping him. There was a clatter as a sword skidded across the floor. Then Jon was on his feet.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Karl Maddox struggling with two of the men. One of them was raising a sword hilt over Maddox's head. Then Jon felt hands closing around him. He twisted, savagely, driving his knee upward. A groan of pain hissed in his ear and the hand relaxed.

But there were others. They were all around him now, and he could see the slashing glint of metal cutting in at him. He threw himself into the nearest man, his fists lashing out with all the strength he had. Shouts filled the air, the room spun in dizzy circles about him. And Jon swung desperately into the mass of face and bodies that swiftly encircled him.

He felt a ripping tear, then a stunning shock that numbed his left arm. The sword flashed down at him again. Barely in time Jon twisted sideways. The blade caught the front of his shirt, slashed it to ribbons, and a red furrow seeped across his chest.

HIS breath was a searing pain in his throat. He could feel blood pounding in his head, dizziness sweeping over him. Dimly he heard Vartha shouting: "Alive—you fools—alive!"

Then strong arms encircled him, pinning his arms to his side. He tried to break the hold, but it was useless. A sword point flicked at his throat. A stunning shock paralyzed him. He sagged forward.

Moments later he found himself standing before the dais. The dizziness had passed but he was so weak he could hardly stand. He was aware that Karl Maddox was standing beside him,

dazedly rubbing an ugly welt on the side of his head. And then his eyes were on the dais.

Ogar Vartha was glaring down at him with furious eyes. The girl was staring at him—fearfully it seemed. And then suddenly she pointed.

“Uncle—his shoulder—the Atlan symbol!”

Jon glanced down at himself. His shirt had been ripped open down to the waist. A red cut was seeping blood slowly across his chest. And the mark on his left shoulder, the sword and haloed hilt stood out in plain sight.

Vartha’s voice was an ominous rumble. “So you thought you would trick me! You *are* Baltú Calthon’s son! Both of you are in the Atlan plot!” He turned his fury on Karl Maddox. “So you rebuilt the machine! What is the secret of the sphere? I warn you to answer while you are still able to!”

Karl Maddox raised his eyes. Jon watched him tensely, his mind once again a daze of perplexity. Maddox looked once over at Jon. Then:

“What has happened to—Baltu Calthon? . . .”

Vartha slammed his fist down on the throne. “So you refuse! Very well, you will see what has happened to him—and what will happen to you!”

He signalled to Frav, and Jon saw a grim smile cross the guard Leader’s face. Once again he felt hands grab him. But he had no strength left to resist. He felt himself being twisted around. As he turned he caught a fleeting glimpse of wide blue eyes staring after him. Wide blue eyes and quivering lips. . . .

### CHAPTER III

OF THE trip through the city Jon remembered little. He was aware of being mounted on one of a number

of horses outside the palace wall, with Karl Maddox riding silently beside him. He was aware of the guards ringing them in with drawn swords. One of the ringing questions that puzzled him concerned those swords. With a mere touch they produced terrific shock. It was almost the same as grabbing hold of a live 110 volt circuit.

The city itself was strangely silent as they passed through it. There were stone and metal buildings on all sides, with narrow winding streets that were somehow incongruous with the modern architecture. To Jon it seemed as if a page of ancient history had been added to plans of the future. He felt that he might have been in medieval Europe, riding on horseback through cobblestone streets lined with buildings from a 1945 city.

People stood along the buildings staring at them as they passed. Some of them hurried inside as if fearful. Others pointed and mumbled in low tones. The clip-clop of the horses’ hooves sounded in a staccato rumble.

Finally they reached a tall girding wall which Jon wearily noted had guards standing post on top. A huge gate swung outward as they approached and swept through.

A cool sweet breeze swept around them almost at once. Jon gazed at a wide expanse of grassland stretching off toward rising hills in the distance. Then something else rose before him.

From a first glance it appeared to be just another group of buildings. But Jon noticed a number of things at once. The buildings were not constructed of stone or metal. They were crude wooden huts. And there was a tall system of wire fencing surrounding them. Simultaneously the breeze brought another revelation. It was the smell of unwashed bodies, of sickness, of disease. The smell of a prison.

A prison! The word suddenly brought Jon erect in his saddle. He studied the enclosure with attentive eyes. They were approaching a break in the wire fencing, a break filled by a sturdy metal barricade. Beyond it, he could see small groups of men huddled together in tattered garments. Even from a distance Jon could see the wasted sag of their bodies. As he looked at them, Jon heard again the outburst of Vartha: "*You are Baltu Calthon's son!*"—You will find out what happened to him, and what will happen to you!" Who was Baltu Calthon? Was it the same Baltu Karl Maddox heard from the dying lips of his mother? If it were indeed his father, what was he doing in this stink-hole of filth? What did it all mean?

"Ho, Frav! I was wondering when you'd get here! Are these the Atlan fools that crashed in that machine?" A green-clad guard leader stepped up to Frav's horse as they stopped before the barricade. There were a number of others standing silently around, watching, their hands resting on sword hilts.

Frav nodded, motioning to the rest of his troop. "The Atlord has special plans for these two! We'll be seeing some sport within a day or so!"

Jon was yanked roughly from the saddle. Beside him Karl Maddox had fallen to the ground and was painfully crawling to his feet. Frav had leapt from his horse and came up behind Jon, shoving him roughly.

"Inside with you—and you better make your reunion with Calthon a good one! It will be your last!"

JON twisted sharply, fury clouding his face. His fists were clenched as he met the eyes of the Leader. A sneering smile was on Frav's face, a taunt, almost a wish that Jon would

try something. Karl Maddox touched Jon's arm.

"Easy, Jon. We'll straighten this out with Vartha later."

Jon stared at him, frowning. He heard the guards laugh loudly, and then they were shoved through the now open barricade. It rolled shut behind them.

"What did you mean, straighten this out with Vartha?"

Maddox shrugged. "There are a lot of things we don't know about yet. We can always compromise, if necessary. . . ."

Jon would have replied, but his eyes caught sight of a group of men approaching. They were shuffling forward on thin emaciated legs that seemed as if they would buckle at every step. Their clothing, what there was of it, hung on them in tattered shreds. Their faces were sunken and haggard. Some of them had large red blotches on sickly yellow skin.

Slowly Jon and Maddox approached the group. There were three men in the group, and they stopped when they saw the two men approaching.

For long silent moments they stared at one another. Jon could feel the close scrutiny of feverish eyes. Then one of the men pointed.

"His shoulder—it is he!"

Once again attention had been called to the mark on his body. Jon looked closely at the men. "I have never seen you before, yet you seem to recognize me, even as Ogar Vartha did, and—"

Beside him, Karl Maddox stepped forward. "Do you know a man named Baltu Calthon?"

The name had an immediate effect on them. They glanced quickly at one another, and to Jon it seemed as if a ray of hope and gladness seized them.

"Follow us." One of them suddenly spoke.



They turned and began walking toward a row of huts a short distance away. A tense excitement rose inside Jon. He knew that something important was about to happen to him, something that might shape the destiny of his life. A fear rose in him too. The thought of having a real father—alive somewhere, he had kept hidden from his mind. It had been too much to hope for, a dream. And now within the space of a few short hours, amid veiled threats, and the revelation of a girl who had been a part of his secret thoughts, whose name had come to him in a flash of memory, but who still remained a mystery, had come another name. Baltu Calthon. And the son of Baltu Calthon. The son. . . .

They stopped before a decrepit hut. The wooden walls were weatherbeaten and warped. A foul stench arose around it, almost sickened him. And the door of the hut opened.

A MAN stood in the opening. He was tall. White hair fell loosely on the back of his head. His shoulders were stooped, but still retained a semblance of proud carriage. On his left shoulder, blazing against the pale skin, was a sword with a haloed hilt of gold. His features were haggard, sunken, only the eyes alight with life. He wore a frayed and dirty pair of trunks.

"You are Baltu Calthon?" It was Karl Maddox speaking.

The old man nodded. "I am." His voice was strong, the only thing about him that was.

Maddox pointed to Jon. "I have reason to believe this is your son."

It was so easily said. Almost brutally. Jon swallowed a lump that was growing in his throat. This man, this wreck of a man—this was . . .

Baltu Calthon was staring at Jon. His lips had suddenly begun to tremble.

He stared from the mark on Jon's shoulder, to his strong youthful features and waving blond hair. Then words tumbled from him.

"Jon . . . Jon! It is my son! My son!"

Feeble arms were suddenly embracing him. He could feel the tall figure trembling against him. Unconsciously his own arms tightened around the frail figure. There was a wetness rising in his eyes which he couldn't force back. And with it came a throbbing fury. This was his father, a father he once had known but whom he had forgotten. What had happened to him? Who was responsible for his degradation?

Baltu Calthon stepped back. There was a simple majesty about his face and a burning fire in his eyes that Jon guessed had been absent for many years.

"Your mother, Jon . . ."

Jon turned his eyes away. A choked feeling rose in his throat. He looked over at Karl Maddox as the words slipped from his lips. "She's dead . . ."

He heard the weary sigh of pain that might have ruined years of hope, of waiting. "Tell me . . ."

Jon looked helplessly at Maddox.

"Perhaps I had better tell it," Maddox advised, moving closer.

Jon listened. He listened again to the same story that had struck him cold with doubts, fears, and questions. The same story that had begun in the office of Dean Phillips. He wondered how many million years had passed since then. It seemed like an eternity had slipped by since that moment, as if he hadn't begun to live, as if everything was to begin with that revelation. He knew the story by heart now, so he wasn't interested.

But there were other things. The little girl with blue eyes and raven

hair. The little girl that was now a grown, beautiful woman. The one connecting link that had remained with him. The one thing that somehow fitted into place, and yet, was somehow as far away as before. He thought of the name that had surged to his lips when she suddenly stood there before him. "Geryl . . ." He could see himself repeating the word. He could see the wonder—and fear, it seemed, in her eyes. Why had she seemed afraid?

He became aware that Karl Maddox had finished. There was silence about them. And Jon saw that their little group had suddenly grown. It seemed as if a myriad of haggard, emaciated men had suddenly surrounded them. He could see their eyes fastened on him.

A hand rested gently on his shoulder. Baltu Calthon's lips were trembling.

"My son, almost I wish that you too had died in the wreck of the time globe. Perhaps it would have been ever better had Karl Maddox not discovered its secret. There is nothing left of the proud heritage you were once a part of. Nothing . . ."

**T**HERE was bitterness in the words. Bitterness and a cold despairing agony. Jon took the feeble hand from his shoulder and pressed it hard in his own.

"There are so many things I don't understand—Dad." That sounded funny. Automatically he glanced at Karl Maddox, the man he had grown to know as his father, the man, the scientist he had really never understood. But the man he had always called Dad—until now.

"Yes there are many things, Jon. I must tell you, even though it is now too late." Baltu Calthon turned to Maddox. "You sir, as a scientist, may be interested, but . . ."

His voice trailed off. He seemed to

be gathering strength for an ordeal that was painful in merely calling it to mind. They waited.

"Thousands of years ago our race was mighty and proud. The great land of Atlantis was the seat of culture and civilization of the entire world. Our science had brought knowledge to the as yet barbarian races of the other continents. There was only peace and happiness.

"Then came the great cataclysm. Forces within the Earth, forces unknown, unreckoned with, destroyed in a single day the civilization and culture that had been Atlantis for tens of centuries. It began with great tidal waves that swept in over the land. Our people were wiped out by the thousands, our cities engulfed beneath the weight of the seas.

"Those who managed to escape the initial catastrophe fled to higher land, to the hills and mountains. But it was useless. The mountains became active volcanoes, stirred from their slumber of eons. They poured molten death and destruction down upon the fleeing Atlanteans. Our race was caught between two of the mightiest of nature's upheavals. Our doom was sealed.

"Soon all that remained alive was a small band of refugees that had gathered on the highest plateau of the land. But even they knew that it was but a question of time, a few minutes, a few hours. For the seas poured onward toward the white hot lakes of molten rock that seethed from the erupting mountains. The sun was darkened, lost forever. Great storms sprang up, winds of untold magnitude that threatened to blow the little band of refugees from the plateau.

"And then the seas met the flaming mountains. The forces of space were rent asunder. The continent exploded, the very world itself seemed en-

gulfed. The last of our race gathered on the plateau resigned themselves to death. But they did not die."

Baltu Calthon paused. Not a sound broke the silence around him. Jon stared in awed fascination, waiting. Then:

"Such was the power of the cataclysm that a rent was made in the ether itself. A great space-warp was formed around the plateau. A warp that caught the remaining Atlans and swallowed them up. We have since learned that they were caught in a rupture of the space-time continuum. At the very moment when death was imminent, in the very wake of the catastrophe, the few remaining members of our race on the continent were thrown into time.

"When their senses returned they found themselves in a verdant valley. There was peace and calm, nothing to indicate that nature had torn itself to pieces seemingly a few short moments before.

"And thus our race was saved. Laboriously, over a period of centuries the remnants of Great Atlantis strove to rebuild itself. It was not an easy task. They had nothing left but their hands—and memories. But our race had built itself up from nothing before, it but remained to accomplish this again.

"That was close to five thousand years ago. This is Atlans as it exists today, a civilization that was built gradually from the pitiful handful that remained. . . ."

**B**ALTU CALTHON'S voice trailed off. Jon glanced quickly from his father's tired features to Karl Maddox. The scientist was standing rigid, his eyes intent, incredulous.

Jon cleared his throat. "But what about—us? . . ."

Baltu Calthon nodded slowly. "I was

coming to that, my son. What I am about to say is not easy. I have tried to show the courage and determination of our people, the heroic sacrifice they offered themselves unto, the equally courageous efforts they made to rebuild their lost Atlan civilization.

"They did succeed. Our New Atlans was modeled after the peaceful race that had been their forbearers. We developed culture and our science was fast growing to the proportions it had maintained at the time of the great cataclysm. Our leadership for nearly five centuries now has been handed down to the Scientists of the realm, for government is nothing more than a science in itself. Thirty odd years ago I was chosen by the Grand Council to take over the administration of Atlans after my father, the Atlord, died.

"One of my closest friends was a man named Ogar Vartha. He was a member of the Grand Council and a man of great ambitions. He planned the celebration of my marriage which took place shortly after I took office. We were as close as men can be in friendship—I thought. . . .

"Aside from my duties as Atlord, I had been experimenting with a theory that had grown to be an obsession. I had always been interested in the history of our race, and since nature itself had proven there was a space-time continuum, I knew I would never be satisfied until I perfected a machine that could also breach time.

"About this time I had a son—you, Jon. Ogar Vartha had never married, but his sister had and a child was born to her shortly after. Her husband died in an accident and he took the child and his sister in. We lived, both families, in the Atlord palace. I had dreams of someday. . . .

"But all this time I had been developing my time globe. I knew I had

perfected my original theory and that time travel was close to achievement. I wanted to go back in time and see for myself the might that had once been Atlantis. But I did not reckon with the man I had called my best friend.

"Ogar Vartha had always been ambitious. As a scientist he had never achieved greatness, but he was a member of the Council and held a position of great responsibility. It wasn't discovered until too late that Vartha had been secretly plotting against his own government with a minority group who sought power and domination. I should have known what was happening, but my work occupied all of my time.

"I had just perfected my time globe and was about to announce its completion to the Council, when Vartha's plot was discovered. But by then it was too late. As a scientist he had developed a new weapon known as a vibro-sword, an implement charged with electrical forces controlled by the user. This weapon can kill a man instantly when used at full power. His minority group was armed with this when the revolt took place.

"The meagre military forces that were at my disposal—in a land that had never known war and bloodshed—were far inferior to Vartha's with his new weapon. Within a few days he had taken over the entire city and had the palace surrounded. It was only a question of time before he would take that.

"He sent me an ultimatum. He offered me freedom and protection if I would turn over the secret of my time machine to him. He threatened to kill my wife and son if I refused.

"He would have done it, I knew then. He had been my friend only to gain my confidence and hide the dreams of conquest he held. I realized what would happen if I turned over the time

globe to him. He would have used it to further his conquests on other races, in other time worlds.

"I could not let this happen. But I also could not sacrifice my wife and son. So I destroyed all the plans for my machine and sent my family into time—and I hoped, safety, in the one I had completed. I remained here myself, hoping to thwart Vartha's plans, and eventually build another globe and bring back my wife and son.

"That was twenty years ago. Since then Vartha has ruled Atlans with an iron hand. The people are enslaved, and the small groups of loyal followers that fought with me and escaped capture, have banded in the hills, living as outcasts, hoping that someday they will have the power and leadership to strike back. I myself have been kept alive because Vartha knows that if he kills me the secret of the time globe will die with me. It has been twenty years of torture and agony, but up to now I, and the remnants of the Grand Council whom you see around you, have managed to remain alive—with only a dim hope for the future. . . ."

SILENCE closed in on them. Jon could hear Karl Maddox breathing heavily. But Jon had eyes only for Baltu Calthon, his father. He saw pain and despair written on those features aged far beyond their years. And he saw something else . . .

"What about Ogar Vartha's niece—Geryl . . ." Jon asked suddenly.

Baltu Calthon shook his head sadly. "Shortly after Vartha took power his sister died. Vartha raised the girl himself. She knows only what he has seen fit to teach her. She believes that Vartha acted to save Atlans from—me, and the Council. She has grown to hate the remnants of the loyal Atlan forces hiding in the hills. Every ter-



Maddox shrugged. "We would only be postponing what Vartha has in store for us."

Jon turned to his father. "The loyal Atlans in the hills—how can we reach them?"

Baltu Calthon shook his head. "Do not say we, my son. It is a long arduous journey. The rest of us here could never make it before Vartha caught up with us. We have barely enough strength to remain alive. But you—"

"I could never leave you here," John said firmly.

"There is no other way. You must take this chance while it still remains. Do you forget the vow you swore to lead the Atlan people against Vartha?"

Jon set his jaw grimly. No, he hadn't forgotten. And he knew his father was right. As a group they could never hope to escape. It would take speed and endurance. Vartha would not be long in pursuit. A sudden chill swept through him.

"But what will happen to you? Once Vartha finds that I have escaped he will—"

"You must think only of your duty to Atlans, my son. As for me, I do not believe Vartha will kill me—yet. He still has not the secret of the time globe."

Yes, there was something to that. Jon clung to it desperately. Inwardly he knew that if it were not for this one slim hope he could never leave his father as a tool for revenge.

Maddox stirred beside Jon. "Then there is nothing left to decide. Vartha will never get the secret from you, Baltu, and if I am not here he can get nothing from me."

Jon gripped his arm. "You're going with me?"

"What else!" Maddox replied. "I'll be of more use fighting with you than here!"

Baltu Calthon nodded. "That is true. But only the two of you must go."

Jon took a deep breath. "Very well," he said. "How do we reach the men in the hills?"

BALTU CALTHON stepped slowly to the doorway of the hut. He pointed off in the direction of the Moon which had risen high above the hills.

"To the East, my son. I do not know exactly where Drego has banded. But once you are in the hills you need not worry. He will know of your approach and make himself known."

Jon frowned. "Who is Drego?"

"One of the few remaining junior Officers of the Atlan forces. He has taken command of the guerilla bands. A man of courage but lacking initiative. He would never attack in force for fear that Vartha would take revenge upon us here. You must persuade him, my son."

Jon nodded, glancing over at Maddox. The scientist had set his lips in a tight line. There was a cold grimness about his eyes.

"How much more time do we have?" Maddox asked.

Jon glanced through the doorway up at the Moon. It had been climbing steadily. Cloudbanks were gathering, scudding across the glowing orb, deepening the shadows of the night.

"Not very much. If she succeeds it will be soon."

"Then you must hurry!" Baltu Calthon said urgently. "Go, my son, and the fate of Atlans rests with you."

Jon felt the feeble arms close about him for a moment. He felt a choking in his throat. Then, with Maddox beside him, he slipped from the hut.

The clouds grew thick overhead, and Jon welcomed them. In the deep shadows they slipped from one hut to

the next. They could hear dim rattles of breathing as the other prisoners slept, unaware of what was about to happen. Jon felt a deep guilt at having to leave them behind. But he knew there was no other way. He vowed that they would not remain as prisoners much longer.

They reached the last hut, and crouched in the deep shadows at its side. Overhead the Moon peeped fleetingly from behind a protecting cloud. In its light he glanced quickly ahead.

The main barrier lay a short distance away. Jon judged it to be twenty yards or so. There were deep shadows around it whenever the Moon slipped into sight. His gaze switched to the far sides of the enclosure. At long intervals he caught the sudden glints of metal in the moonlight. The guards were patrolling the outside extremities of the prison.

"What do we do now?" Karl Maddox whispered.

Jon glanced again overhead. "Get ready. When that next cloud covers the Moon we'll make a dash for the gate. Slip into the shadows around it and wait."

The seconds seemed an eternity. The cloudbank crawled slowly forward gripping the edge of the Moon. Then there was another eternity of waiting as it slowly moved forward. Gradually the dim light faded.

"Now." Jon breathed.

They ran swiftly forward across the open space. Jon felt the blood pounding in his temples. If the guards saw them . . .

The shadows of the solid metal barrier closed around them as the Moon slipped back out. Beside him, Jon felt Karl Maddox breathing heavily. "Now what?" he whispered.

Jon leaned forward, listening. Outside he could hear the sound of feet

crunching on the ground. That would be the guards. He heard a stifled yawn. Then he relaxed. They hadn't been noticed.

IT was the waiting. Seconds that seemed like minutes. Minutes that seemed like hours. Each beat of his heart was like a drum throbbing in Jon's ears. He began to fear for Geryl. He should never have let her attempt this. If there was the slightest mistake . . .

The minutes crawled by. Beside him, Jon could feel Karl Maddox moving nervously. A new fear took root in Jon's mind. Had Geryl decided it was too great a risk? Or had Vartha discovered her absence?

There was a sudden low sound from outside the barrier. A rapid scuffling of footsteps, a low exclamation, sudden groans, and silence.

Even the wind had stilled. The sudden absence of sound seemed to shriek in Jon's ears. What had happened? What—

Before them the metal barrier moved. It slipped outward revealing a narrow gap that grew wider. The two men rushed through it.

Jon glanced swiftly about, every muscle tense.

"Jon! Over here—quickly!"

Then he saw her. She was standing beside the control board of the gate. Her hands worked swiftly with the controls, and behind them, Jon heard the barrier closing. He saw the sprawled bodies of two guards off to one side. One of them was stirring feebly where he lay.

Jon ran forward with Maddox beside him. The girl met them, a vibrosword held in one hand.

"You must hurry!" she said softly. "I have a horse saddled for you!" Then suddenly she stepped back. For

rible thing Vartha had accomplished was skillfully made to look like part of the loyal Atlans."

"I see," Jon replied slowly. He was thinking of the look of fear and wonder that had crossed the girl's face when she recognized him.

Beside Jon, Karl Maddox cleared his throat.

"Then there isn't much hope left for —you?"

Baltu Calthon turned tired eyes. "We have no leadership—someone to inspire resistance. And Ogar Vartha is powerful."

"Why resist any further then?" Maddox asked.

"I don't understand," Calthon said.

Maddox shrugged. "You have your son now. Why not give Vartha what he wants? Don't forget, he has us to work on now . . ."

The old man's hands trembled. "That is true . . . He would stop at nothing!"

Jon's eyes flamed. "He can do anything he wants—he'll never succeed!"

"Maybe," Karl Maddox replied, looking away.

"There is a way!" Jon insisted, turning to his father. "You mentioned groups of loyal Atlans waiting in the hills for leadership!"

"That is true, Jon, but—"

"I will lead them."

There was silence. Then Maddox laughed scornfully. "Aren't you forgetting where you are? Look around—this is a prison, closely guarded by Vartha's men. That fence—"

"It is electrically charged," Baltu Calthon cut in.

"Exactly. To be of any use you would have to escape—and Vartha would still hold your father—and us! What do you think would happen then?"

Jon looked at his father. A sudden

flame of hope had been born on the old man's face, to quickly die as Maddox spoke.

"That's a chance I'll have to take," Jon said grimly. "There must be a way. *There must be!*"

## CHAPTER IV

THE stars twinkled down like jewels in a soft blue ceiling. Over beyond the hills there was a faint glow that grew brighter with each passing minute. The Moon would be peeping over the horizon in its dismal march across the sky. A soft cool breeze stirred, whispering in the silent night.

Jon sat wearily on the grass at the far end of the stockade, close to the wired fence that meant death at a single touch. Jon watched the Moon edging over the hills and wondered if the face that looked down from that glowing orb never got tired after thousands of ceaseless years of watching.

He welcomed the breeze that whispered softly about him. The inside of the hut had been more than he could stand. There was an odor of death there, death that was remorseless and cruel, death that fed on the sickness and poverty of the men still clinging to life. Out here in the night he could breathe, and think.

Jon's thoughts were heavy. The story his father had told them earlier in the day had left him in a daze. He could still hardly grasp the fact, that he, raised in the modern atmosphere of the twentieth century, had been in the true sense of the word, an alien, an orphan of another race, another time. And now that he had traced his heritage he found only bitter disappointment, and tyranny at the hands of a power mad ruler. He shook his head sadly in the night. It was much

the same wherever men banded together. There would always be Hitlers, even though their names were different.

Jon's hand strayed to the haloed sword on his shoulder. His lips tightened. But this was different. He had a duty, a destiny. Vartha must be stopped, and . . .

He remembered Geryl. Something closed around his heart. In hurting Vartha he would be hurting her. She would be sure then that what she had been taught was true . . .

A sound interrupted his thoughts. He glanced up into the night at the wire fence a few feet away. The wind whispered gently.

It came again. The sound of a voice.

"Jon . . . Jon . . ."

He squinted his eyes into the dimness of the night. Then he saw a vague movement outside the fence. It grew closer, became sharp in outline.

She huddled down close beside the fence. He could see her now.

"Geryl!" The word slipped from him in a hoarse whisper.

"Not so loud—the guards will hear us!" she cautioned in a soft voice.

Jon immediately came to his senses. The startled surprise at her sudden appearance at the very moment his thoughts had turned to her, vanished. But something else took its place even as his eyes switched up and down the shadowed fence. It was something indefinable, a sense of thrill that stirred within him.

"Why have you come here?" Jon asked, straining as close to the charged fence as he dared. He could see her clearly now, huddled close to the wire, the moonlight peeping around her. She was dressed in a long dark cloak that mingled with the night shadows. Only her face, hands, and a glimpse of white ivory leg from a fold in the cloak, were visible.

"I—I kept thinking of you . . ."

HIS pulse quickened. He looked at the sweet oval of her face framed in the moonlight, the half parted lips, the tense delicate curve of her nostrils that made him think of a deer nervously sniffing the wind for a sign of danger. And the wide blue eyes that were fixed upon him.

"Why should you think of me?" he asked.

Her eyes dropped. "I have always thought, I—" she faltered. "I remember as a little girl . . ."

His heart began singing. She remembered too! The one memory that had clung to him, haunted him through the years. Not even the thought of his father. Everything suddenly lost color.

"It's quite a difference, isn't it—from a garden to prison!" His voice was cold.

"What else did you expect?" He could feel the sudden hostility in her voice. "Your family has done nothing but plot against the government of Atlans—"

"My family!"

"There is no use in you trying to deny it! If it hadn't been for my Uncle your father would have succeeded—and now you . . ."

For a moment Jon stared at her. He was struck by the sincerity in her voice. And it was like a cold dagger twisting in his throat. His father had been right.

"Geryl! Listen to me!" He moved closer to the fence until his face was scant inches from the deadly wire. "Ogar Vartha has deliberately lied to you about my father! It was your Uncle who overthrew the Atlan government and tried to force the secret of the time globe from my father. It was for that reason that my mother and I were sent through time to safety—Vartha had threatened our lives if my father



refused!"

Her face was white in the moonlight. She shook her head. "I am sorry, Jon. I had hoped you wouldn't try to deny the truth—to me. The only reason Baltu Calthon didn't escape was because my Uncle prevented it. Now you have returned—with another of the strange machines to plot against us..."

"I didn't return to plot against you! I didn't know—"

"Then why did you return?"

He fell silent. It was useless, he could see. There was nothing he could say that would influence her. Vartha had done his work well.

"I wish now that I had never returned," he said at last.

Her voice became low and pleading. "Jon, why don't you give up this terrible idea? And if your father really has the interest of Atlans in his heart why doesn't he release the secret of the globe? I'm sure my Uncle would forgive—"

Jon laughed dryly. "Is that why you came here tonight? To persuade me to give the secret of the time globe to Vartha—so he could use it to further his dreams of conquest?"

She sat still and silent on the grass opposite him for a long moment. He was suddenly aware that her eyes had grown misty.

"No that isn't why I came."

He waited.

"You know of course what will happen to you..."

Jon nodded grimly. "I can guess. Your Uncle isn't likely to let anyone stand in his way. But if you think that I, or any of us are ready to give in, you're wrong. As for myself, as long as I have life left in me to resist, I will. I don't imagine that will be very long."

She winced. "Don't you realize how foolish you're being? You're signing your own death warrant!"

"Is that what you came to tell me?"

Her eyes dropped. "No—I came to help..."

He stared at her. "Help? I don't understand. Help who?"

"You."

He shook his head. "It's no use. I told you before."

"You don't understand! I want to help you escape!"

HE SAT and stared at her. The night wind whispered gently around, hummed through the charged wire fence that lay between them. A frown crossed his face.

"You mean you're willing to help us?"

"I mean you! Not the others..."

His spirits sagged. "Why me?"

She turned her eyes away suddenly. "I know I shouldn't but I can't help it—I remember as a child... If you don't leave here you'll die."

There was something in her voice that stirred him. He remembered once again a flowery garden with a little girl of raven hair and bright blue eyes. Was it possible that she—

"Don't you see—I'm offering you a chance to—live!"

He saw. But he saw something else that she had apparently forgotten. He shook his head.

"It's no good. Even if I did manage to escape—where would I go?"

She broke in eagerly. "You could join the guerilla bands in the hills—you'd be safe there!"

Hope jumped inside him. He had forgotten all about them! If he could reach the loyal Atlan group...

"I know I'm betraying not only my Uncle, but all of Atlans, for I know that you will stir up the rebels..."

It was as if she had read his thoughts. He watched her closely. Her features were pale, though it might have been

the moonlight. But he couldn't mistake the slight quiver of her lips.

"And knowing that you're still willing to help me escape?"

Her eyes dropped again. "Yes. Can't you see . . . But after tonight I don't want to see you again. Ever—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you can prove to me that I was right in helping you."

He saw her eyes suddenly raise to his. And what he saw there chilled him. She was offering him his life, risking her own safety to help him escape. And she was offering something more, something that he suddenly realized meant a great deal to him. But he could only claim it by betraying the few loyal Atlans left to oppose Vartha. It was not an easy choice, but he knew there was only one.

"How do you expect to help me?" Jon spoke grimly now, casting quick glances off down the shadowed fence, but no guard was in sight.

"The main gate," she replied quickly. "There are only two guards on duty there at night. I'll be there in an hour—I'll have a vibro-sword with enough power set to stun them. It will have to be done quickly—before any of the other guards make the rounds of the fence. You will be waiting close to the barrier. If I manage it I will open the gate and you can slip through. You will be on your own from then . . ."

"And you?"

A brief smile crossed her features. "I will get back to the city—somehow."

Jon breathed heavily in the sudden quiet. It was a daring plan. One that could work—but she was only a girl, no match for any of Vartha's guards.

"What if you're recognized?" he said anxiously.

She drew the cloak tighter about her. "It is dark, but that is a chance I will

have to take."

She was right, he knew. And then suddenly his blood warmed. Once the gate was open, what was to stop the entire group from escaping!

"You'll be there in an hour?" he asked tensely.

"Yes."

And then suddenly she was gone. He strained his eyes in the dim moonlight, caught a fleeting flash of white as her feet sped over the grass, and then she was gone.

JON slipped into the hut quietly. He could hear the labored sound of breathing as his father and Karl Maddox slept. Dimly he made out their forms sprawled on pitiful mats of straw. He shook them gently.

Karl Maddox jumped to his feet. For a moment he stared wildly about him, then his body relaxed.

"Oh, it's you, Jon. What's wrong?"

Baltu Calthon was sitting up on the floor of the hut, his features pale and sickly in the stream of moonlight that filtered in from the open door. Jon moved between the two men.

"I just saw Geryl."

Maddox exclaimed softly. Baltu Calthon got tremblingly to his feet.

"Where? How?" The old man's voice was incredulous.

Jon explained what had happened in brief sentences. He couldn't keep the excitement out of his voice as he spoke. When he had finished his father sighed.

"I find this hard to believe. The girl is taking her life in her hands. Why should she do this?"

Maddox laughed softly. "Women in love are always blind!"

Jon turned on him. "What difference does it make why she is doing it!" he snapped. "This is our only chance—and we've got to take it while we can!"

the first time she seemed to notice Maddox. "I told you only—"

Jon silenced her. "Maddox is not an Atlan. I kept my promise."

She looked wistfully at him for a moment. Then she nodded and handed him the sword. "Take this—just in case."

Jon took it. Maddox already had started for the horse, standing in deep snags beside the fence.

"Go—hurry!" she breathed.

Jon clenched his teeth briefly. I'll never forget this, Geryl," he said. Then suddenly he had her in his arms, crushing her against him. His lips found hers and for a lingering moment he felt her yield, felt her body tremble against his.

Then he broke away and sped to the waiting horse. He mounted, and motioned Maddox up behind him. Seconds later, with the sword balanced across the pommel, he urged the horse forward.

His last glimpse of the girl found her standing rigid, one hand held up against her lips, then she was running into the darkness toward the city.

## CHAPTER V

JON held back the horse's speed. The animal was beginning to show signs of fatigue, its sides heaving tumultuously. Although they had been riding for only a short time, to Jon it seemed like years had passed. And the main skyline of hills seemed as distant as when they had started.

A long silver ribbon stretched out ahead of them. Karl Maddox loosened one hand from around Jon's waist to point to it. Jon glanced at the river and headed the horse that way.

Minutes later he reined in beside the stream. Maddox slid to the ground.

"A hell of a way to travel," he

grunted.

Jon smiled grimly as he dismounted and led the horse to the river. The animal gulped greedily at the water.

"We've been lucky so far," Jon said quietly. "It would have been a long walk."

Maddox was moody. "I still can't get over how damned easy it was. Almost too easy."

Jon didn't reply to that. Almost the same thoughts had been in his own mind as they fled over the rolling grasslands. He had looked back many times, fearfully, nearly wishing he might see some sign of pursuit. But there wasn't any. The strangeness of it puzzled him. Vartha's guards were too smart to let them get away without a fight once the escape was known. But nothing had happened.

Maddox moved alongside him. "Where do we go from here?" he asked.

Jon shifted the vibro-sword from his hand through his belt. Then he looked off toward the hills. The river wound Eastward, following a course that led from some source deep in the hills. The grasslands converged into a V shaped basin off in the distance. He pointed along it.

"We'll follow the course of the stream East. Once we get among the hills it will be a hit and miss proposition. If my father was right, Drego will have outposts somewhere along the line."

Maddox snorted. "And if he doesn't all we have to do is wait for Vartha to come after us!"

The horse lifted its muzzle from the water. Jon patted the wet nose and motioned to Maddox. Moments later they were riding again.

The minutes passed, and with them, Jon began to feel free. The tenseness that had built up inside him ebbed away. Even if Vartha did send a pa-

control after them, they had too much of a head start. His only regret was that he had had to leave his father behind.

The grasslands slipped behind them. The terrain became rocky and uneven, the stream narrowing and slithering through short gulleys like a wounded serpent. The hills loomed. And with them, safety.

HE held the horse to a slow trot as the first trees swept behind them. The night closed in amid the deep shadows of the forest, and but for the guiding ribbon of water, Jon knew that further progress would have been impossible.

The minutes passed. Jon suddenly felt Maddox lean forward.

"Hold up for a minute!" he said.

Jon reined in. He twisted his head.

"What's wrong?"

"Listen!"

There was the gurgling murmur of the water. There was the low whisper of the night wind through the woods about them. And there was something else.

Jon stiffened. It was the careful muffled sound of hoofbeats!

"They couldn't have noticed us so soon!" Maddox grunted.

Silently Jon agreed. It couldn't be any of Drego's forces—or could it?

Jon twisted the reins quickly. The horse responded, pulling away from the stream and into the fringes of the woods. Maddox slipped quietly to the ground and hurried away into the darkness.

Jon waited tensely, straining his ears into the night. The sound of approaching horses grew, and then suddenly Maddox was running up beside him.

"It's Vartha's men—three of them! They must have been waiting at the edge of the woods! It was a trap!" Maddox spit the words out.

Jon felt his blood run cold. Something that had been building up inside him, a hope, a whisper of yearning for a raven haired girl, suddenly drained out of him like acid spilling from a broken phial. It hit him all at once. The way she had met him beside the fence. There had been no guards around at that time—why? The ease with which the escape had been accomplished—the waiting horse—it had all been deliberately planned!

*But why?*

And as the sound of the horses grew louder, he knew. It was like a searing pain in his heart. She had tried to make him believe it was because of him that she wanted to help, when all along acting under Vartha's instructions, she had been baiting the trap. The trap that would lead straight to the Atlan forces in the hills!

Jon flicked the sword from his belt as a burning fury swept over him. There was no backing out now. It was too late. Three of them. His finger felt along a round projection beneath the hilt. It gave way under his finger. The sword vibrated in his hand. He waited in the darkness.

He didn't have to wait long. Three bulky shadows loomed along the river's edge. A silver ribbon of moonlight lanced down, revealing them as they passed within scant yards of Jon's horse deep in the shadows. They rode alertly, hands ready on the hilts of their swords. And Jon recognized the leader.

It was Frav!

ALL the anger and fury that had been building within Jon suddenly burst. His left hand tightened on the reins of the horse, his right hand lifted the sword, and with a shout welling from his lips he shot his horse forward. Jon's move caught the rearmost



horseman off guard. By the time the guard twisted his head in alarm, Jon was upon him. His sword arm flashed downward, ripped through muscle, flesh and bone. The guard gave a single cry and fell limply from the saddle.

By this time the surprise was gone. Jon saw Frav wheel his horse around and his sword flashing. The other guard had twisted in his saddle and struck out blindly as Jon swept by.

Jon felt a stinging numbness creep over his left shoulder. For a moment he nearly lost control of the reins, but he held on grimly. He wheeled his horse in a desperate turn and came up alongside the second horseman. Even in the dim light he could see the look of fear and terror that spread over the guard's face. Then Jon's sword slashed downward again. Blood spurted from the man's throat. He gave a single strangled cry and slumped forward.

Something crashed against Jon's horse, nearly knocking him from the saddle. Frav, his face a mask of hate and fury, swung his sword in a slashing arc toward Jon's head.

Instinctively Jon parried the blow. A blaze of sparks exploded into the night as the charged weapons clashed. Nearly blinded by the sudden glare, Jon tried to wheel his horse away. But Frav was too skilled. He closed in, locking Jon's mount against the riderless horse beside him. Jon saw Frav's sword arm flick out at him again. The point was headed straight at his throat.

There was only one thing to do, and Jon did it. He lurched sideways in the saddle and flung his sword arm up in a desperate parry. Frav's blade threw up another shower of sparks as the weapons met. The point flew by Jon's throat and he heard Frav cursing wildly as their bodies jarred together.

It was too close to wield a slashing riposte, Jon knew. His breath was

burning in his throat as he suddenly hurled himself forward upon the startled guard leader. His left hand shot out and connected with Frav's jaw. It was a stinging impact that left Jon's arm numb. But the blow caught Frav off balance. His sword clattered to the ground and he swayed sideways in his saddle.

Jon threw his own sword into the darkness and lashed out with both fists. Frav gave a strangled curse and fell to the ground. Jon flung himself from his horse and was on top of Frav before the other man could get to his feet.

Everything was a whirl of motion after that. Jon pinned the guard leader to the rocky ground and slashed his fists into the struggling body beneath him. It was almost as if he had all the evil in Atlans beneath him at that moment. He continued to pound smashing blows into Frav long after his body went limp.

"For God's sake, Jon, he's had enough!"

Strong hands suddenly pulled Jon backward. It was like a cold douche clearing his mind. His body was suddenly weak. He rose trembling to his feet.

MADDOX was kneeling beside Frav, examining him. John stood silently by rubbing his bruised and bleeding hands. Finally Maddox rose.

"He's unconscious."

"I should have killed him," Jon gritted.

Maddox shook his head. "He'll be more valuable alive. You recognized him, didn't you?"

Jon nodded. "Yes, it's Vartha's Guard Leader, Frav."

"Planted by Vartha to follow us to the Atlan guerilla forces after his niece paved the way for our escape," Mad-

dox added.

Jon grimaced at the reminder. It was turning the knife that had all ready twisted deep within him.

"I said before it had all happened too easily."

Joe turned angrily. "You've said that before. All right, so it was a trap, and we nearly walked into it. But it didn't work!"

Maddox laughed suddenly. "I wonder what she thought when you kissed her! She's probably laughing yet!"

Jon felt himself flushing. But it was a flush of rising anger. There was no reason for Maddox to keep rubbing it in. But he was right. Jon felt again the warm throb of Geryl's lips against his. The kiss of Judas. All he lacked was the thirty pieces of silver.

Frav stirred on the ground. Jon moved over beside him and motioned to Maddox.

"Get something to tie him up with—one of the belts over there." He pointed to the sprawled bodies of the dead guards. Maddox moved reluctantly.

Frav crawled painfully to his feet, staring dazedly around him. Jon scooped up his fallen sword and waited.

Gradually Frav's eyes cleared. A smear of blood drooled from his swollen lips. He rubbed his hand painfully across them.

"I'll kill you for this, Calthon!" His voice was a hissing promise.

Jon laughed and flicked the sword at the guard Leader's throat. "You had your chance and failed. Whether you remain alive is up to Drego when we reach him."

Jon saw Frav suddenly cringe. "You're taking me there—with you?" His voice was fearful.

"If I wasn't you wouldn't be alive now. Karl!"

Maddox came up behind the Atlord

soldier with a long strip of leather belt. Moments later Frav's arms were tied securely behind him. John inspected the lashings and nodded.

"Get the horses. There's enough for all of us now."

He boosted Frav into his saddle and mounted his own horse. Then, with Maddox leading, the reins of Frav's horse fastened to the rear of his saddle, Jon pointed along the river.

"We'll follow the stream. I'll bring up the rear, just in case."

Maddox nodded, then turned suddenly to Frav. "Vartha would give a lot to know where the guerilla forces are hidden—wouldn't he?"

The Atlord soldier remained silent.

Maddox laughed. "Well you're going to find out—anyway!"

Jon breathed easier when they were once more on their way.

THE sun rose slowly over the tops of the hills. A shower of color cascaded through the woods, went shimmering along the river, flashed among the trees. The woods became alive around them. The call of a myriad bird throats warbled on the morning air.

Jon gazed with tired eyes around him. They had been traveling all through the night. With the river as their only course he knew they must be deep within the hills. Valleys and rocky gorges rose on all sides, and the woods were deep and shadowed even in the light of the morning sun.

Ahead, Karl Maddox twisted in his saddle. He looked past Frav, glum and silent.

"Where the devil are these people? Our horses won't go much further without rest!"

Jon let out a sigh. "We'll keep on going until they drop then. It can't be much further."

But it was much further. The sun stood high in the sky before Jon called a halt beside the stream. He dismounted and stretched his legs painfully. The night in the saddle had stiffened his muscles.

Maddox was bitter as the horses were watered.

"Not to mention the fact that we haven't had any food and sleep, even forgetting that, can you tell me what sense there is in pushing on? The further we go the worse off we get!"

Jon glanced up at the Atlord Leader. Frav, his face streaked with dried blood, his lips swollen and his eyes bloodshot, managed a leering grin.

It was at that moment that Jon stiffened.

A shout went up from behind them. It was followed by another shout at their front. Then from all sides. Jon whirled, his hand drawing at the sword in his belt.

Out of nowhere a group of horsemen suddenly appeared. From all sides they bore down, the strangest, wildest group of men that Jon had ever seen.

Their faces were covered with heavy beards. Their clothes were frayed and tattered remnants of cloth and metallic material. They held a variety of weapons, ranging from lance-like spears to clubs and a spattering of rusted swords.

But it was their faces that held Jon spellbound as he turned slowly, ready and alert. They had the features of men who have lived in the wilds, reckless, with the haggard gauntness that only extreme hardship can produce.

Scant yards away they halted, a solid ring of hostile faces, and Jon was suddenly aware that they were not looking at him—they were staring with hate filled eyes at Frav!

The ring of horses suddenly parted. Another of the men rode through the

gap and pulled in beside Jon.

THE rider was tall, broad shouldered, and middle aged. His face, from what Jon could see of it behind the black growth of beard, had a livid scar running diagonally across the left cheek. A huge hand firmly gripped the hilt of a vibro-sword. Jon noticed a pair of black watchful eyes staring down at him.

"Blood of Atlans!" he roared. "The mark! The rumor was true—it is the young Atlord!"

Jon was aware of a host of eyes centered upon him. But a glowing triumph rose within him. These must be—

The bearded rider swung lithely from his saddle and advanced with wide open arms. Jon felt himself crushed in a fierce embrace. He was dimly aware of joyful shouts rising about him.

Then the man stepped back. His bearded features split into a wide grin.

"My name is Drego, guerilla Leader of the Loyal Atlan forces. When I heard the rumor from Vartha's stronghold that Baltu Calthon's son had returned with a stranger in the long vanished machine—I didn't believe it! I heard that you had been imprisoned, that Vartha planned to kill you!

"Then early this morning some of my outposts rode in with news of three riders deep in the hills. I knew that Vartha wouldn't dare come here with such a small force, but I never dreamed it would be you! Nobody has ever escaped from Vartha's clutches that easily!"

He broke into a string of profanities that brought a grim smile to Jon's lips. In crisp words, Jon explained what had happened. He saw the look of astonishment cross Drego's face as he finished.

"That wench is just like her Uncle!" Drego spat out. Then he turned ominous eyes on Frav. "So we meet

again, brave dog! How does it feel to be captured without a hundred or more Vartha swine to support you?"

Frav glowered silently, but Jon noticed the look of fear that crept into his eyes. Drego turned to Jon.

"This swine is very brave when he leads a full troop armed with vibroswords against a scattered band of defenseless Atlans. He is also very handy with torture whenever one of us is captured." Drego fingered the livid scar on his cheek suggestively.

Jon drew his attention away from the Atlord guard. "This is Karl Maddox. It was he who re-built my father's machine and helped me to return..."

Drego nodded gruffly to Maddox. "By my blood, but you come at a difficult time. Your father, my lad, what of him now?"

Jon shook his head dolefully. "I swore a vow to free Atlans. If my father is touched by Vartha he will pay deeply."

Drego nodded approval, then suddenly slapped his sword against his leg.

"Blood of Atlans, but I forget what you have been through last night. Let us return to camp, we will talk after you have eaten and rested."

Jon grinned his thanks. Once again he mounted. But this time a rising flame of hope rose with him. He was among friends, among the last of the loyal forces that remained in Vartha's path to complete domination. He rode with his head proudly erect.

THE sun was slipping behind the Western skies when Jon and Karl Maddox pushed back the crude wooden dishes and wiped their mouths. The food, a foreign tasting, watery stew, had done much to revive them.

Jon stared past the squatting figure of Drego around the Atlan camp. What he saw did not raise his hopes for an

early victory over Vartha. The camp itself lay in a small valley surrounded with wooden hills. Crude thatched and wooden huts sprawled over the scene, and the guerilla forces, less than two hundred in strength, and poorly equipped with a motley of arms, stood little chance against the many well provisioned troops that were at Vartha's command. Jon caught Karl Maddox's eyes and saw the same opinion written there.

Drego leaned forward. "Well now, how was that!"

Jon grinned. "It hit the spot." Then his face sobered. "It's more than my father has..."

Drego scowled. "At least we have that swine Frav! He'll get a taste of what Vartha has been handing out to Atlans!"

Maddox spoke slowly. "That isn't going to solve anything. What we want to know is what chance do we have of attacking Vartha?"

Drego sighed and looked over at Jon. "For years I have been holding the remaining Atlan forces together here in the hills. Our number is small, our arms weak. I never dared an open attack, although I would have liked to. Vartha would have killed Baltu Calthon and the rest of the Council he has imprisoned. Now that you have returned, Jon, the decision is up to you."

Jon felt the crushing weight of responsibility suddenly pressing down on him. And with it, he was suddenly very tired. There was much planning necessary before an attack could be made, and it seemed like years had passed since he last slept.

"We'll talk about it in the morning, Drego. Have you got some place for us to sleep?"

Drego lumbered to his feet. Jon rose, and with Maddox beside him, followed



the guerilla leader to a small hut.

It was clean inside. A number of crude cots with wool blankets covering them were the only furnishings.

"It isn't much," Drego said. "But it keeps the rain out."

Jon barely heard him. He lowered himself wearily on one of the cots. Maddox picked one out near the doorway, and Drego left.

But sleep did not come easily. Jon tossed fitfully, visions of his father, haggard sick, and yet still proudly erect crossed his mind. He saw himself again in Vartha's palace, saw the hulking form of the Atlord glaring down at him. He saw Geryl. . . .

He dozed lightly, dimly aware of passing time. Once he thought he saw Maddox rise from his cot, then sleep claimed him again.

It seemed like he had been sleeping but a few moments when he was suddenly awakened by a loud shout from outside. He leapt from the cot and to the door of the hut. He was surprised to see that the Moon had risen well up over the hills.

The shouting grew louder, was echoed by other voices. And then suddenly a figure ran swiftly toward him.

It was Drego.

"What's the matter?" Jon demanded tensely.

Drego roared furiously. "That man—Maddox!"

Jon twisted sideways, glancing into the hut. Maddox wasn't there. "What about him—has something happened—"

"Blood of Atlans! I didn't trust him from the start! The dog has released Frav, stolen two of our best horses and ridden off!"

Jon stared incredulously. "What! But that's impossible—where would he go—why?"

"Where? Hah! Where else but

to Vartha! *We've been betrayed!*"

## CHAPTER VI

**BETRAYED!** The horror of Drego's words burst upon Jon like a torrent. They left him weak and sick. Maddox! Karl Maddox a traitor! The man who had raised him, who had rebuilt the time sphere; it wasn't possible. But it was. It suddenly was all clear to Jon. For he understood Karl Maddox in a way he had never thought of before.

His mind flashed back to the farm in Wisconsin. Little things that hadn't seemed important at the time, but things that were all too clear now revealing the character and thoughts of the man. "Phillips is a fool! . . . He and the rest of the stupid dolts . . . they're jealous of me. . . . I'll have them crawling to me! . . ." Bits of words. Flashes that brought a hidden ruthless ambition out into the open. He remembered the scene in Vartha's stronghold. The restraint Maddox had shown as he carefully waited—testing the balance of power, seeing just who was likely to win. The reunion at the prison, and how Maddox became moody. "There isn't any hope left. . . . Why resist Vartha any further. . . ."

It all crossed Jon's mind in a flash. He saw now the careful game Maddox had played. He waited until he saw there was no hope for the Atlans in the hills, and then when the chance came for the escape he was eager to go—eager to find the Atlan camp and gain Vartha's favor! He recalled Maddox's words to Frav: "Vartha would give a lot to know where the guerilla forces are hidden—"

And then the crowning twist of fate. Jon felt his blood turn to water as a cold deadly fear gripped him. *Maddox knew the secret of the time sphere! Once Vartha had it there would be no reason to keep Calthion alive! And after that—*

"We've got to stop them!" Jon burst out, grabbing Drego's arm.

The guerilla chief roared futilely. "If they could have been stopped I would have done it! Blood of Atlans! That swine Frav knows these hills almost as well as we do—by now he's halfway to Vartha!"

"And once they get there—" Jon left the sentence hanging.

"Vartha will have his cavalry riding down on us before dawn!" Drego finished.

That would mean slaughter, Jon knew. Unless—

Drego slammed his fist against his sword scabbard. "We'll have to leave here—we'll head South for our main camp—"

"Main camp? I thought this—"

Drego swore. "Blood of a dog, no! Our main force is to the South with our women. If only we had the hundred men I left there, to back us up, we could give Vartha a fight!"

And then it hit Jon. A daring plan that brought fire to his eyes. "Drego, we're not going to head South!"

Drego's mouth dropped open. "What! You would have us wait here to be slaughtered? Blood of—"

"Hold it!" Jon snapped abruptly. "We've got a chance to turn the tables on Vartha!"

Drego stared at him uncertainly.

"Listen," Jon spoke tensely. "Vartha will expect to catch us off guard. At the least he will expect us to try and escape. He will be prepared to follow our trail no matter which way we head. But there is one thing he won't expect!"

"What is that?" Drego asked slowly.

"He won't expect us to attack the prison!"

Drego rubbed his bearded chin uncertainly. "It's too risky—"

Jon nodded. "Of course it's risky—but don't forget, Vartha will have most

of his men searching the hills for us! The last thing he will expect is an attack when we should be running away!" John clenched his teeth suddenly. "Besides, if we don't attack tonight, it will be too late. With Maddox on his side, Vartha won't need my father alive. Don't you see—"

Drego reached out and gripped Jon's shoulder. "Blood of Atlans, but you're right! It would be the last thing Vartha would look for! I've waited a long time for a chance like this! I'd like to see Vartha's face—"

"We haven't done it yet ourselves," Jon cautioned. "How soon can you get your men together?"

"They're ready now!" Drego roared. "By the blood—"

"Then what are we waiting for?" Jon snapped.

He was reaching for his sword hilt even as they ran toward a group of waiting horses.

THE thunder of flying hooves echoed through the night like the muffled beat of rolling drums. Overhead the Moon had started its long decline down the sky. Its pale light revealed close grouped echelons of horsemen, bent low over their saddles. It caught the glint of ready swords held in tense eager hands.

Jon, riding at the head of the lead group beside Drego, felt a thrill run through his body. He glanced over his shoulder at the compact mass of horsemen behind, some two hundred veteran Atlan fighters, eager for the taste of battle. He saw the last of the hills fade to their rear, and a grim smile twisted his lips in the wind.

The plan of attack had been simple. Once they reached the edge of Vartha's stronghold and the prison itself, the group would divide in two parts. One would attack the prison,

overcome any resistance and liberate the men inside. The other group would take a position between the walls of Atlan City and the prison and meet any re-enforcements sent out. Jon knew that ordinarily it would be a futile task, but with most of Vartha's forces attacking the deserted guerilla camp deep in the hills, the element of surprise would be on their side.

The descent from the hills had been tedious. Drego had led his forces in a circuitous route to the North, coming out on the grassy plains at a point Northeast of the city, where, Jon knew, there was little chance of running into Vartha's men. Dimly ahead, Jon could make out the lights of the city.

"Ho! Ahead!" Drego's voice roared over the tumult of wind and hoofbeats.

Jon swung his sword high in answer. His blood pounded in his veins as his eyes rested on the city, growing closer with each passing moment. For the first time in twenty years loyal Atlans were riding in attack!

The city was in plain sight now. Jon could make out the high walls, and beyond them the gleaming metal spires of buildings. And then he caught sight of the prison at the edge of the city.

"Ho!" Drego suddenly shouted. He twisted in his saddle and gave a signal with his sword arm. Immediately the converging lines of horsemen split into two groups. Drego shouted over at Jon.

"I'll keep the rear gate of the city covered!"

Jon acknowledged with a sweep of his arm. Then he turned his head. Some fifty of the guerilla fighters were at his back, in close echelon. He whirled his sword overhead and pointed at the prison gate. A shout went up from eager throats.

Drego and his men had all ready turned South and were converging upon

the city gate which had begun to swing outward. Jon could see men running on top of the walls, and he could well imagine the consternation that must be taking place as the guards watched their approach.

Then everything was blotted out but the prison. Jon, at the head of his columns, tore down upon the startled guards at the gate. There were ten of them rooted to the ground, digging frantically at their sword scabbards.

Jon reined in sharply and slashed down with his sword arm. He felt the blade graze one of the guards and watched the man go down, paralyzed from the numbing shock of the vibro-current.

THEN he was suddenly in the center of a wild melee as the guerilla horsemen closed in around him, their weapons lashing out. Within seconds the last of the prison guards had been cut down.

Jon leaped swiftly from his horse. He dove for the control panel beside the gate. His sword slashed in a swift arc. Sparks sizzled as the vibro-weapon cut into the controls. Then a loud hum shrieked on the night wind. Jon raised his eyes and saw the entire fence circling the prison, suddenly glow white hot, smoke, sizzle, and melt. A single flash of intolerable light turned the night into day for a brief moment, then darkness.

And the fence was gone!

Jon ran forward into the stockade toward a huddled group of figures beside one of the huts. As he approached, one of them stepped hesitantly forward. It was Baltu Calthon.

"Jon! What has happened. How—"

Jon grabbed his father's arm gently but firmly. "There isn't time to explain now!" he shouted. "Quick—the rest of you—mount behind these men

—we've got to work fast!"

Willing hands pulled the weak prisoners up behind straining saddles. Jon made sure that his father was firmly seated behind one of the Atlan fighters, then he ran to his own horse.

"Ride for the hills!" he shouted to the others. "I'm joining Drego! We'll cover your rear!"

The horses swept away. Jon followed them for a moment with his eyes, then he spurred forward toward the city.

Even at a distance, Jon could see a battle taking place. The guerilla fighters were circling in small skirmisher groups as a host of Vartha's men thundered from the city gate. Shouts and cries of pain filled the air. He could see flashing sparks as vibro-swords met in vicious thrusts discharging electrical forces. Then suddenly he was in the center of the struggle.

A Vartha horseman shot toward him, sword arm raised high, a shout welling from his lips. Jon ducked under the sweeping slash of the blade and struck out with his own. He felt the point rip through flesh, saw the man's body stiffen under the numbing shock of the vibro-current. Then his horse swept by.

His eyes darted wildly about him searching for Drego. But it was impossible to single him out from the milling mass of whirling battle. He found himself surrounded by a sudden group of Vartha guards. His sword flashed through the air in sweeping slashes. He felt the blade rip and tear through cloth and flesh. He caught flashing glimpses of bodies falling to the ground beside kicking horses.

Then his left side went numb.

His horse skidded around in a frantic half wheel. One of the Atlord soldiers was close beside him, his vibro-sword raised high for the final thrust.

There was a hoarse shout as the blade descended. Jon steeled himself for the

blow, unable to control the reins of his horse. Then a huge figure smashed between Jon and the Atlord soldier.

"Blood of Atlans!"

Jon saw a sword sing through the air, meet the descending blade of the guard, and amid a flash of sparks saw the battle scarred features of Drego. The guerilla chief twisted his parry into a thrust and Jon saw the guard fall from his horse. Then Drego twisted his head.

"What are you doing here? The prison!"

Jon dropped his sword and grabbed the reins of his horse with his right hand. "They're safe—on the way!" he shouted.

Drego roared and gave a signal to the guerilla forces. The Vartha guards had broken under the vicious onslaught of the guerillas and were fleeing toward the city.

"Hold!" Drego roared. His sword formed a whirling circle over his head. The Atlan riders, racing after the remnants of the fleeing guards, wheeled around.

"To the hills!" Drego shouted.

Jon was dimly aware of the reforming lines of horsemen. Grimly he held on to the reins with his right hand, trying to keep his body erect in the saddle. He felt as if only half of him were alive, the numbing shock of the vibro thrust still gripping his body.

Then they were racing away across the plains to the South.

**D**AWN was streaking the city with gray when Fray strode into Vartha's throne room. The Guard Leader was streaked with dust and grime and his eyes were weary. There was defeat and chagrin on his face as he neared the dais.

Ogar Vartha stared down at him with furious eyes. Off to one side, Karl Mad-



dox hovered, his eyes wary and watchful.

Frav bowed before the throne.

"So you're back!" Vartha stormed.

Frav kept his eyes lowered. "We combed the hills—there wasn't a trace. . . ."

Behind the throne, the door in the stone wall moved slightly ajar. It went unnoticed.

"Naturally they weren't in the hills—they were here!"

Frav started, raising his eyes.

Ogar Vartha's face was dark with rage. "It was a trick! While you were storming the camp Jon Calthon rode down on us with the guerilla forces! He stormed the prison and freed Calthon!"

Frav's eyes flashed to Karl Maddox. "This is all your work! You deliberately helped me escape because you knew it was a trick to draw our attention away from the Atlan prisoners!"

Vartha turned hostile eyes on Maddox. "I should never have trusted you! What Frav says is true. You plotted with Calthon, knowing that once I had the information of the guerilla camp I'd attack! I wanted Baltu Calthon, now he's gone!"

Maddox stared with a steady gaze at the Atlord. He could read the menace in the black piercing eyes that raged at him.

"What difference does it make if Calthon has escaped?" Maddox asked.

"What difference!" Vartha shouted. "As long as I had Calthon in my power the secret of the time sphere was safe!"

Frav drew his sword suddenly and advanced upon Maddox. The scientist stared at him in sudden fear. He backed away.

"Wait! If you kill me you lose your last chance of getting the secret!"

Vartha stiffened. He gave a sharp command to Frav. The Guard Leader hesitated.

"What are you trying to say?" Vartha demanded.

Maddox walked quickly to the edge of the dais. "When I was in the stockade with Jon's father I learned the true story of what happened here in Atlans. Baltu Calthon told us how you revolted against the Council and took over the government. I know why you want the secret of the time sphere and I know why Calthon wouldn't give it to you. I wanted to find out who was the ruling power before I acted. Now that I know I am willing to join forces with you."

Vartha laughed. "Do you think I would trust you again after tonight?"

MADDOX took a deep breath. "I think so—since I can rebuild the time sphere."

Vartha's eyes narrowed. Slowly the fury died on his face. A cunning expression took its place. Behind him, the door edged open a little further.

"What do you expect in return?"

Maddox smiled. "A share in the conquest. With a fleet of the time spheres, we can carry out your original plans. My own time world would yield riches and power beyond anything you know. And we would be invincible—striking out of nowhere . . . There only remains the question of weapons."

The Atlord leaned forward eagerly. "I have the weapons—something that even Baltu Calthon doesn't suspect—a weapon developed along the principle of the vibro-sword, shooting a bolt of electrical force that will destroy anything in its path!"

Maddox's eyes lighted. "Then there is nothing to stop us—except the Calthons. . . ."

Vartha snorted. "Let them try and attack us! I have waited a long time for this to happen. You will begin work on the time globes at once. . . ." His voice trailed off and a frown crossed his

face. "What about the one you came in—why did it crash?"

Maddox shrugged his shoulders. "I've been thinking about that. There must have been a miscalculation in the strength of the time-warp resistance. I'll correct the fault. . . ."

Behind the dais, the door suddenly closed silently. Behind it, Geryl stood in a dim passage, her features white and tense. There was an expression of horror on her face, and her body trembled. It was true then—everything that Jon had said! Her whole life, everything that she had come to believe in, was suddenly a fraud. Tears streamed down her face. "And I betrayed him. . . ."

The full horror of what she had heard descended upon her. Vartha and the stranger from time, plotting together in a scheme of conquest that would enslave entire civilizations—just as the people of Atlans had been conquered. She saw now things that she had never seen before, and the magnitude of Vartha's plan overwhelmed her.

There was only one hope, she knew. And that hope lay deep in the hills among the outlaw forces she had grown to hate, but which now suddenly loomed as the only salvation left to Atlans.

"I've got to warn Jon!" she breathed. "Before it's too late. . . ."

She walked swiftly back along the passage.

## CHAPTER VII

IMPATIENCE grew within Jon as the days slipped by. Every moment that passed would be bringing Vartha closer to his goal. But there was nothing else to do but wait. A plan of attack was no easy matter, since the Atlord was safely guarded in the walled city, and amply protected by forces that far outnumbered anything the guerilla forces could muster.

The one taste of battle and victory at the prison had raised the spirits of the Atlans in the hills. Jon could see the eager looks on their faces as he walked slowly toward Drego's headquarters. But he knew that more than *esprit de corps* was necessary now.

The camp itself had amazed him. Here there was more than flimsy crude lean-to shelters. There were short, squat buildings of stone, elaborate patches of cultivated soil producing more than enough food, strong, clean corrals for the horses, and a small but efficient machine shop containing the few instruments of science that had escaped Vartha's purge two decades past.

The camp was protected on all sides by thickly wooded hills. It nestled in a hidden valley whose only outlet was through a narrow rocky gorge toward the East. An alert system of outposts was constantly maintained, but Jon knew the chances were small that Vartha would ever attempt an outright attack unless surprise was entirely in his favor. He could afford to wait behind his stone and metal fortress city. He could sit back and laugh at them, and wait.

An Atlan soldier stood guard outside Drego's headquarters. He snapped to attention as Jon approached. Jon nodded briefly and strode inside.

He found Drego and his father seated at a small table. There was a tall jug and a number of glasses set on the table before Drego. The guerilla chief was pouring a dark syrupy liquid into the glasses. He looked up.

"Hah! We've been waiting for you—here try some of this."

Jon moved over to a seat and settled himself beside his father. Baltu Calthon had changed. The haggard sickness had left his features in the few days since the prison release. His eyes were bright and eager.

Jon took the glass, smiling. "Thanks, Drego, what is it?"

"Blood of Atlans! If you haven't tasted *zuril* you haven't lived!"

Jon sipped slowly at the glass. The stuff had a heady flavor and reminded him of a cheap brand of rum. Then he put the glass down.

"Have you taken a complete count of our men?" he asked Drego.

The guerilla chief sighed gruffly and rubbed his beard. "At the most we'll have four hundred. I've sent out word to the few remaining bands in the West. It will be a few days before they can reach here. By my blood, we still won't have half enough!"

Baltu Calthon nodded. "Vartha has at least a thousand well equipped men. To crush him we would have to enter the city itself. They could cut us down from the walls. And in the meantime Vartha will have Maddox at work on the time sphere."

A HEAVY silence fell. Jon knew that beyond anything else the time sphere presented the worst problem. If Vartha wasn't stopped soon, further resistance would be useless. Once Maddox rebuilt the sphere, it would be a simple task to build others. And once there was a fleet of the machines ready, Vartha's dreams of conquest would be fulfilled. But there was still one thing. Jon looked over at his father.

"There's still a chance that Maddox won't be able to correct the fault that caused the machine to crash."

Baltu nodded thoughtfully. "But it is a slim hope, my son. It is a simple problem, the fault lies in the gyro-mechanism. The helix coils around it have to be increased. If Maddox discovers this we are lost."

Jon thought it over broodingly. Karl Maddox wasn't a man to stop when a problem faced him, especially a scienti-

fic problem. It would be almost too much to hope for that he wouldn't discover the fault, unless. . . .

There was a sudden rise of shouts from outside. Jon stiffened and glanced quickly at Drego. He saw the sudden fear in the guerilla leader's eyes. Was it Vartha? . . .

Drego leapt from the table. Jon followed him. They had taken only a few steps when a group of Atlans swarmed into the room. Two of them were pushing a figure into the room.

Jon stiffened, too startled to move. Beside him, Drego let out a roar. "Blood of Atlans! It's the wench!"

The men released the girl. She stood swaying lightly, her eyes weary and hunted. Then suddenly she sank forward to the floor.

"Geryl!" Unconsciously Jon uttered her name. He knelt beside her and lifted her from the floor. "Clear off the table!" he ordered.

Drego moved forward, muttering. Behind Jon, the Atlan soldiers said:

"The outposts found her wandering in the hills—we thought it might be a trap, but there was nobody with her—she was brought in. . . ."

Drego muttered as Jon forced some of the *zuril* fluid between the girl's lips. Her face was pale and smudged with dirt. Her clothes, the clinging metallic garment that ended in a short skirt around her knees, was torn in spots. There were scratches on her legs and arms.

"I wonder what Vartha sent her for this time!" Drego rumbled. "Don't forget she betrayed us once already!"

Jon set his lips grimly. No, he wasn't forgetting. The memory of that night in the stockade was all too fresh in his mind. She stirred.

Jon stepped back from the table as she slowly sat up. She looked around at them and suddenly her eyes centered

on Jon.

"I—I've been trying to find you. . ."

Jon's voice was cold. "So you could set another trap? Where have you got Frav hidden this time?"

She winced under the scorn in his voice. "Please—I came alone."

"Naturally," Jon replied dryly. "Our outposts made sure of that before you were brought in. What is it this time—an ultimatum from Vartha?"

She swung her legs slowly over the edge of the table and stood up. Her eyes dropped before the hostility that hung tensely around her. Then she looked defiantly at Jon.

"I suppose—you hate me. I, I don't blame you. . . ."

"By my blood!" Drego roared. "That's damned generous considering what you did!"

SHE turned on him, her eyes brimming. "I know it! I did trick you that night. My Uncle wanted to find your base in the hills. But that was before I knew the truth—I'm glad it didn't work. . . ."

Jon felt something stir within him at the sincere ring in her voice. But he remembered another time when her words had sounded just as convincing.

"What's made you change your mind?" he asked her.

She turned blue tearful eyes on him. Her lips trembled. "Ever since I've been a little girl I've been taught to hate you and your people. My Uncle told me that if it hadn't been for him Baltu Calthon would have enslaved all of Atlans, and that he had invented a machine to carry his conquests on other races.

"When you suddenly returned with the scientist Maddox I was sure that Vartha was right. He told me that a plot was under way to overthrow Atlans even now, and that you had returned

for that purpose. That was why I betrayed you that night. . . ."

Jon remained silent.

Her voice picked up again. "Then when Frav returned with the scientist Maddox, I learned the truth. I was listening in the passage behind the throne room while he and my Uncle talked. It was then that I learned how my Uncle was responsible for the revolt against the Grand Council, and how he had tried to get the invention away from your father. I was horrified when I heard Maddox offer to rebuild the time sphere for my Uncle in return for a share in the conquest of time.

"Everything you told me that night, Jon, was true—but I couldn't believe you—don't you see? . . ."

Her voice trailed off and the tears streamed unchecked down her face.

Drego cleared his throat. There was uncertainty written in his eyes. "If what you say is true, wench, then why have you come here?"

"Because I couldn't stand by and watch them succeed. I wanted to warn you, and do anything I can to help. . . . My Uncle already has Karl Maddox rebuilding the sphere. With the complete resources of the city at his disposal it will be only a matter of days! I slipped out of the city and rode for the hills—I've been wandering around ever since trying to find you. . . . What can we do?"

Her voice ended on a pleading tone that brought a grunt of submission from Drego.

"Blood of Atlans, but I don't know what to think!" Drego rumbled.

Baltu Calthon stepped forward suddenly. He rested his gaunt hands on the girl's shoulders. She looked up at him with steady wistful eyes.

Then the old man suddenly turned to Jon. "I believe her. It has taken a great tragedy to show her the truth,



but she knows it now." He turned back to the girl. "You realize what must happen to your Uncle if we are successful in stopping him?"

She nodded slowly. "I know. . . ."

TO JON, it was as if the world had been reborn. The anger that had gnawed at him for what she had done, melted away. He saw only the humble appeal in her eyes, the wretched despair that gripped her. He moved close beside her.

"I'm glad, Geryl. . . ."

She smiled, and her hand found his.

"By my blood!" Drego grumbled. "This still settles nothing!"

Jon straightened. "Well, when you heard your Uncle and Maddox discussing the time sphere, did they mention anything about correcting the mechanism?"

The girl frowned. "Yes—but Maddox apparently didn't know what caused it. Why?"

Jon turned to his father. "It just occurred to me that if we can lead Maddox off on the wrong track we may be able to delay him long enough to work out a plan of attack ourselves."

The old man frowned. "It is possible, my son, but how—"

"Through Geryl," Jon replied.

"Geryl?"

Jon nodded, turning back to the girl. "You're quite certain Vartha doesn't know you deliberately came to us?"

"I'm sure of it," she replied. "I went for a ride and didn't return. He probably thinks I was kidnapped by some of your men."

"Good," Jon faced his father. "That's exactly what we want Vartha to think. He doesn't know that Geryl overheard him and Maddox plotting together. As far as he knows she is still on his side. We're going to send her back."

"What!" Drego shouted. "Send her

back? Blood—"

"Just a minute!" Jon snapped. "If my father draws up a set of plans for a revised sphere, cleverly faked of course, and if they fall into Vartha's hands, it may delay Maddox before he finds the real trouble!"

Drego's mouth dropped open. "You mean, the wench. . . ."

"Exactly. Geryl will *escape*," he emphasized the word, "and when she returns she'll have a set of plans with her that she managed to steal. . . ."

A moment of silence fell. Then Jon added: "Geryl can keep her eyes open for a day or two, getting the plan of Vartha's defense in the city. Then she can report back to us. We can use the information to strike at the weakest point." He hesitated. "Of course, it's a lot to ask, and there's always the possibility that Vartha may catch on. . . ."

Geryl's eyes glowed. "I'm not afraid, Jon. I'll do anything!"

Balthu Calthon shook his head gravely. "This is a grave undertaking. If Maddox should discover that we tried to trick him it would go hard with you."

Jon didn't say anything. He knew he couldn't because it *was* a terrible risk. He suddenly regretted mentioning it at all. If anything should happen to Geryl now. . . .

"Please, I know what you all are thinking, but I want to do it. It's the least I can do after. . . ."

Her voice trailed off as she looked up at Jon. There was a lump in his throat, and a sudden pride. But the sudden smile he gave her didn't hide the anxiety that reached up from his heart.

NIGHT had fallen over the valley, a somber blanket of stars and scudding clouds. The Moon had not yet risen. The camp was silent, but there was an air of tense watchfulness that Jon felt as he walked slowly be-

side the girl to a group of waiting horses. Ten Atlan soldiers were mounted and ready to ride.

Ahead he could hear Drego giving rapid orders. "Remember now, once you reach the plains let the wench ride out ahead of you. Make sure Vartha's men see you chasing her. When she gets close to the gates, turn back. And by my blood, ride fast!"

Jon pulled the girl to a stop. Silently he handed her a sheaf of papers that Baltu Calthon had completed short minutes before. Then he took her in his arms. Once again he felt the nearness of her, the soft clinging of her lips against his.

He watched her ride off down the valley and felt a vast loneliness close in about him. It was as if the world faded into the night with her. Then Drego was beside him.

"Don't worry lad, she'll come back. . . ." Drego spoke lowly.

Jon clenched his teeth and didn't reply.

. . . The days followed one another in grim procession. And with them the tension in the Atlan camp grew. Jon was kept busy organizing the growing ranks of the guerilla fighters that filtered in from the far reaches of the hills. He was glad of something to do, anything to take his thoughts away from the girl. Every day that sped by without her return increased his fears.

Around him he could see the guerilla forces taking shape. There were a good four hundred men, not half of what was needed, Jon knew, but it was all they could muster. From morning to night he and Drego drilled the mounted fighters, pounding into them battle tactics, echelon attack, close support, and above all the fact that there would be no retreat. The men responded with an eagerness that set Jon's hopes soar-

ing.

The largest problem lay in the supply of weapons. At the outset less than two hundred men were equipped with vibro-swords. But this had been overcome with the tireless work of Baltu Calthon. From his meagre workshop a steady stream of newly forged and electrically charged weapons poured.

A week later everything that could be done had been accomplished. It but remained for the final decision—the question of where to attack and when.

Jon sat moodily in Drego's headquarters, facing his father and the guerilla chief across the table.

Drego poured himself a glass of zuril and sighed. "By my blood, now that we're ready to strike I begin to fear we've bitten off more than we can chew!"

Jon nodded gloomily. "Without a knowledge of what Vartha is planning as a defense, we're running into a stone wall. Something must have happened to Geryl. . . ."

THE guerilla leader rubbed his beard thoughtfully. "She should have been back days ago, if she was coming at all. Blood of Atlans! Maybe the wench has tricked us again!"

Jon glanced helplessly over at his father. But Baltu Calthon remained silent. He could read the doubt in the old man's eyes, and knew that the same question had occurred to him.

"I can't believe that. . . ." Jon said hesitantly.

"Hah! But I can!" Drego rumbled. "If it was a trick, Vartha will be waiting for us. We'll never get inside the walls."

Jon leaned forward. "That's what's been bothering me. No matter what plan of attack we use, we have to get inside the city!"

Drego laughed grimly. "Hah! May-

be Vartha will open the gates for us!"

Jon ignored the sarcasm. "Somebody will have to. I've thought it over very carefully, and it's the only answer."

Baltu Calthon frowned. "What do you mean, my son?"

"Just this," Jon replied. "We could storm the city with a thousand men and fail. Vartha's forces could cut us down from the walls. When we attack one of the gates will have to be open. It will have to be a surprise—and done from the inside."

Drego scowled. "A good plan, but who—"

"Me."

"What!" Drego's mouth dropped open. "You?"

Jon nodded. "Don't argue with me, it's the only way. Here's the way I've got it planned." He traced his finger along the top of the table. "I'll enter the city tomorrow morning disguised as a farm worker from the South. I'll use the North gate, next to the prison. I'll lay low inside the city waiting for night-fall. That's when you'll attack."

"You'll take two hundred men and approach the city from the Southeast. You'll head for the main gate. This will draw Vartha's attention away from the North. In the excitement I'll manage to reach the North gate somehow and open it. You'll have the remaining two hundred men waiting on the North plains. Once the gate is open you'll draw the rest of your forces from the South end of the city. If we work fast it will catch Vartha's men by surprise . . ."

"And what about you?" Drego snapped. "You wouldn't live five minutes!"

"I'll take that chance. Don't you understand we've got to do it? Maddox may have discovered the real fault in the time sphere already. Once he does it will be too late!"

Drego looked questioningly at Baltu Calthon. The old man had a tired look in his eyes.

"Why must you take the risk, my son?"

Jon set his teeth. "Because I won't trust it to anyone else. If we fail now our cause is lost." He turned to Drego. "You will wait until the Moon rises. Then you will attack. Do you understand?"

The guerilla chief lumbered to his feet. "Blood of Atlans! But I do understand! What you propose to do is a crazy thing—"

"That's why it may succeed," Jon said softly.

JON huddled in the deep shadows of the palace wall as the sun slowly sank in the West. The hours since dawn had been a kaleidoscopic haze in his mind. The entering of the city, in the peasant garments of a farm worker, had been easy enough. But once inside he had expected seizure at every step.

It had not been easy. The tension grew within him with every passing minute. He had been careful not to remain in one place too long where the watchful eyes of the Atlord's guards could single him out. Mingling with the crowds he had been able to determine the strength of the city's defenses, and especially, those surrounding the North gate. There were three guards at the control center, where a flick of a button would operate the massive metal structure. On the wall itself other Atlord men were stationed in short intervals. And Jon noticed something else. On the wall, a short distance from the gate, a strange machine was being mounted. From a distance it resembled a cross between a modern machine gun and a trench mortar. His attention, however, had been centered on the control center. If luck were with him,

he could strike there, open the gate and smash the panel, and then . . .

These thoughts flew in disjointed sequence through his mind now as he huddled in the shadows of the low seven foot wall surrounding Vartha's stronghold. He had come upon it unconsciously, almost before he knew it. And once there, it had held him like a magnet. Inside, within reach of his voice, Vartha would be—and with him, Karl Maddox, and Geryl.

A clatter of hooves rose from the street opposite him. Jon drew closer against the wall, in the shadows of the setting sun. A mounted patrol thundered past him. He could have reached out . . .

He heard another sound. A soft sound, a sobbing. Jon stiffened. *The sound came from the other side of the palace wall! And it was the sound of a woman crying!*

Realization burst on him in the same instant. He was outside the palace garden! The garden where he had played as a child, where Geryl . . . Geryl! It was her voice!

His breath a hoarse whisper in his throat, Jon glanced quickly around him. The street was deserted, the patrol out of sight.

He hesitated only an instant. Then he bent his knees and jumped upward. His fingers caught the edge of the stone parapet and he pulled himself swiftly up. For an instant his body was caught in the fleeting daylight, then he had dropped over the wall.

He landed in a tangle of tall bushes. The scent of flowers rose about him in a wave. And something else. He heard a stifled gasp. Then a startled voice.

"Who is it? What—"

Jon edged out from the protection of the bushes. His eyes traveled swiftly about him. The garden was wreathed in shadows. He could make out the lat-

ticed metal archway that was the entrance to the garden from the courtyard, and beyond it, the tall flagstone walls girding the palace itself.

Then he saw her.

SHE was standing in the path that ran on a diagonal across the garden, her body alert and trembling. She was clad in a shimmering cloak that fell down past her waist. He saw her hand fly suddenly to her lips.

"Ssh!" Jon uttered a low warning and sped across the banks of flowers. He pulled her toward a cluster of bushes.

"Jon! Jon! How—"

In crisp words Jon told her what had happened. She listened, her eyes wide and fearful. When he had finished:—

"I tried to get word to you, Jon, but I couldn't. My uncle has had me guarded every minute. He believed my story but hasn't allowed me to leave the palace since I returned." She wrung her hands tearfully. "You mustn't let Drego attack—he's walking into a trap! My Uncle has a new machine—a ray weapon—he's having it mounted on the walls! The Atlans will be slaughtered!"

Jon felt a cold hand close around his heart. He remembered now seeing the strange mechanism on the wall at the North gate.

"It's too late now, Geryl," he choked the words out. Then he gripped her fingers tightly. "What about Maddox?"

Despair poured out of her. "He laughed at the plans. . . . He's had the laboratories working night and day rebuilding the sphere. I think—"

Jon silenced her. "Then we have to succeed tonight! Within a few hours the Moon will rise, and then—"

A loud shout echoed around them. Jon wheeled.

A group of men were rushing into the



garden. Jon could see the flash of swords. And at their head was Frav!

"It's Calthon!" Frav shouted.

Jon heard the girl's cry of terror as he dove for the wall. He stumbled through the bushes and leaped desperately for the parapet. If he could get over it there was still a chance. . . .

His fingers gripped the edge of the stone. But at the same instant he knew it was too late. Something sharp stabbed into his side from behind. A numbing flash of electrical shock swept through him. Dimly he heard rising shouts, and the screams of Geryl.

Then darkness swept over him in a wave of pain.

## CHAPTER VIII

THEY were all there, Geryl, Ogar Vartha, Karl Maddox, Frav, and himself. All the constituents of a three-ring circus. Their faces reeled before him in waves of dizziness. He could see the cobra glance of Vartha's eyes, the tigerish fury of Frav, and the contented hyena smirk on Karl Maddox's face. He saw the contrasting fawn-like fear of the girl, but he couldn't see himself. It all seemed funny. Where was the band that would sound fanfare to the finale? The beasts in the arena were eager to leap upon their victims.

Jon felt a stinging slap across his face. Then the dizziness passed. He stared into the flaming features of Frav. The guard leader lashed out again.

Jon tried to duck the blow, but he was so weak his knees buckled. He felt hard knuckles against his teeth and then the warm salty taste of blood in his mouth. He hit the floor.

"Get up! This is only the beginning of what you're going to get! I—"

"That's enough! I've got my own score to settle with him!" Vartha strode forward to the dais, his face dark with

anger.

Jon heard the words dimly as he struggled to his feet. Beside him he heard Geryl sobbing in soft tones.

"Can't you see he's hurt! You beasts—you—"

Vartha interrupted her with a harsh laugh. "So! I underestimated you, my dear. Apparently the lies of Calthon have impressed you more than I thought!"

"Lies!" Geryl's voice rose hysterically. "Lies! Yes, I've heard lies—but not from Jon or his father or any of the loyal Atlans! I've heard lies all my life—every breath I've taken since my mother died, every word you've spoken to me—those were the lies!"

For an instant Ogar Vartha's face paled. He stepped toward the girl. "Did I hear you say *loyal* Atlans, my dear? Surely you haven't allowed yourself to be blinded by the words of this traitor?"

The tears flowed unchecked down the girl's face. Her lips trembled.

"Traitor? *You* are the traitor! You don't have to pretend any longer—there isn't any use in your lying again—I heard you myself! You and Maddox plotting together to destroy what little is left of Atlans and then further your conquests in time!"

Vartha grabbed the girl's wrist. "You heard that? When!"

SHE struggled in his grasp for a moment, and then suddenly stilled. Her eyes raised unflinchingly. "I was listening behind the dais, in the passage . . ."

Vartha released the girl's hand abruptly and stepped back. His face was flushed with rage.

"So you knew it all the time! Then that story of yours about being captured by Calthon's men and escaping was all a trick!"

She remained silent.

Vartha swung viciously on Jon. "I'm not going to mince words or time with you!" he snarled. "What was your reason for sending my niece back with that story?"

Jon fought back a wave of dizziness. Before he could answer, Karl Maddox let out a short laugh.

"Don't *you* see the reason, Vartha?"

The Atlord stared at him. Maddox laughed again.

"It was the plans she brought back. The plans she told us she managed to steal. It was a clever trick to try and put me on the wrong track!"

Jon felt a cold fear creep over him. Why was Maddox laughing? There could be only one reason. . . .

Maddox stepped forward, his face a bold smirk of satisfaction. "But the trick didn't work. I didn't even tell you, Vartha, even though I was suspicious. The plans Baltu Calthon drew up were very clever, too clever! That's where he made his mistake. I knew that the fault in the sphere was a simple one, and there was only one place it could lie—in the gyro helix mechanism. The way in which Calthon tried to draw my attention from this only proved it to me. Once I was sure, finding the fault was simple. All I needed was a larger gyro, a much larger one to maintain the balance of the sphere under the stress of the space-time warp! The first sphere that I've rebuilt since then is fool-proof. Their little plot failed."

Jon felt a wringing despair gather in his throat. So it hadn't worked. Maddox had seen through it. But what was it his father had said. . . .

Jon became aware of beady black eyes fixed upon him. He saw Vartha standing before him, the hawkish thrust of his nose inches away, the square granite chin, and the tight wide line

of his mouth that was hissing words.

"I've been a fool! I should have guessed that my niece couldn't be trusted where you were concerned! And now you'll tell me why you came here today. What trick did you think you'd accomplish this time?"

Jon glared defiantly at the Atlord. He saw Vartha motion to Frav. The guard leader stepped forward eagerly. Jon steeled himself.

"Wait! I'll tell you why he came!"

Jon twisted his head sharply. Geryl had rushed forward, placing herself between him and Frav.

"Geryl!" Jon called sharply. "For God's sake don't—"

He came to see me. I—I love him. . . ." she said simply.

JON became aware of a number of things at once. A sense of relief swept over him; he saw the look of fury that flushed Vartha's face; and he saw Frav's features pale. The guard leader's eyes flickered from the girl to Jon, and a cold deadly hate smoldered into flame.

Jon suddenly realized that Frav was in love with Geryl himself!

Vartha thrust the girl out of the way with a hoarse curse. "That was a very pretty speech my dear, but it's not good enough!" He towered over Jon. "You had a definite reason for spying on me—what was it!"

Once again Jon saw Maddox step forward. The scientist was cool and suave.

"I think I know the reason, Vartha. He came hoping to get a chance to either kill me, or wreck the sphere." Maddox looked coldly at Jon. "The trouble with you Jon, is you're too idealistic. You always were. If you had had any sense you would have thrown your lot in with me. Now you've lost everything. . . ."

Rage that had been building up inside Jon suddenly overflowed. He leapt forward shouting, his fist lashing out with feeble strength, crunching against Maddox's jaw.

"So this is why you were willing to raise me—so you could use me as a tool to further your insane ambitions! You filthy swine!—"

Maddox staggered back, rubbing his fingers across bloodied lips. Jon followed him up, stumbling across the floor, perspiration soaking his body and a hot foam of rage on his lips.

Frav lashed in beside Jon with a quick movement. His sword slithered from his scabbard in a single motion. Then it slashed downward at Jon.

"Don't kill him, ye fool!" Vartha shouted.

The blade struck Jon across the face. In the last instant Frav had twisted his wrist and the flat of the sword struck Jon. It spun his head over at a crazy angle and he skidded to the marble floor.

He lay there panting, his breath coming in dizzy gasps, the trickle of warm blood oozing into his mouth. He fought the dark blanket that threatened to close in over him as he staggered to his knees.

Vartha strode over beside him, pushing Frav out of the way.

"Where is the Atlan camp? How many men do you have? Answer me!"

Jon muttered thickly. "Try and find out. . . ."

Something warm and soft knelt beside him. Jon felt trembling hands touch his face.

"Jon! Jon . . ."

Then she was pulled away from him. Jon staggered painfully to his feet, his body numb, his face a raw stinging sore. He faced Vartha.

"I'm giving you your last chance to tell me," Vartha shouted. "Where is

the Atlan camp?"

Jon spat a mouthful of blood into Vartha's face.

The Atlord didn't move. Through tight black eyes he glared at Jon. Then slowly the line of his mouth moved.

"Very well. You'll talk, there are ways . . . Frav lock them both up, and alert the guard!"

Beside Jon, Geryl struggled in the grasp of the guard leader. "You're going to kill us! But you'll never find out! You'll—"

Vartha stared at her coldly. "You chose your side, my dear. I have no alternative. But rest assured, *he* will talk. Take them away!"

Jon had a last glimpse of Karl Maddox before rough hands propelled him forward. He saw triumphant laughter in the scientist's face. And beside him, the eager hatred of Frav. . . .

NIGHT had settled over the hills in a dusty wave of ebon. The stars blinked in silver pinpoints in the sky. Beneath them, in a valley surrounded by rocky cliffs and lonely shadowed trees, muffled sounds stirred upward in the night air.

Drego sat mounted on his horse, Baltu Calthon slowly fitting his aged body in his own.

"By my blood, but I think it is better if you wait here. . . ."

Baltu shook his head slowly in the darkness, his white hair a dull gray blob in the shadows. "No, Drego, the fate of Atlans rides with us tonight. My son is risking his life that we may succeed. I can do as much."

Drego swore in the darkness. Then he twisted around, adjusting the sword that hung gleaming dully in the starlight. A fierce pride burned through him as he saw the massed ranks of horsemen behind. He could hear the

low eager voices. Then he turned.

"You know what we must do? I will lead the attack to the South. We will split our forces on the edge of the plains. You will lead half of them to the North. At the rise of the Moon I will attack. You will wait until I am close upon the city, then attack the north gate. By my blood, everything hangs on Jon from then on. If we can get inside the city. . . ."

Baltu Calthon stiffened proudly "Jon will carry out his part. If we failed now. . . ."

He left the sentence hanging. Years of troubled thought swelled upon in that moment. Years in prison. Years of ceaseless torture by Ogar Vartha. Years in which the secret of the time sphere had been kept locked within his brain. And then the sudden return of Jon . . . and the scientist Maddox. And now the secret had fallen into Vartha's hands. He knew only too well that not only the fate of Atlans rode with them this night, but the fate of countless unsuspecting peoples.

"We must hurry," Baltu Calthon said suddenly. "There is little time."

Drego nodded slowly. In the darkness the livid scar on his cheek was pulsing with heated blood. He twisted in his saddle and his voice roared into the night.

"Blood of Atlans! We ride at long last!"

There was a thunder of hooves that split the night wide open.

JON lay limply on the cold stone floor. His body ached in every muscle, every nerve and fibre. The gash on his face throbbed incessantly, but the blood had stopped flowing. His skin felt dry and caked and his tongue was thick and swollen in his mouth.

Beside him, Geryl knelt upon the

stone slabs of the floor. Her eyes rested painfully upon him, her fingers touching the red tinged blondness of his temples.

"Jon . . ."

He raised his eyes from the cold drabness of the cell. The four walls stared mockingly back at him with the single window set high above them in the far wall, staring out into the night. The door opposite them was massive and sturdy.

"Yes, Geryl," his voice was lifeless.

"I'm sorry, Jon. If it hadn't been for me . . ."

He smiled up at her and felt the cut on his cheek break open again. "There was nothing you could do. It was my fault for entering the garden. I walked right into it."

"Jon! You heard what Maddox said about the sphere—he's rebuilt it! What are we going to do?"

"Wait."

"Wait?" she frowned, then her face cleared in a ray of hope. "You mean your father and Drego and the Atlan forces attacking tonight?" Do you think?—"

He silenced her with his hand clamped quickly over her mouth. His eyes sped quickly to the door. Was his eyesight deceiving him, or had he seen it move . . .

Jon took his hand away from the girl's lips. She stared at him in puzzlement. He spoke lowly.

"Without my part in the plan it's hopeless. They'll be slaughtered." His voice ended bitterly.

She moved closer beside him. "Jon, do you think my Uncle will—"

Jon turned his eyes away. "Me, maybe," he lied. "I noticed something tonight—Frav . . ."

She stared at him. "Frav?"

"Yes, when you said you—loved me. I could see it in his eyes. Has he ever—"



"Yes. I—I didn't want you to know. I was afraid . . ."

He laughed bitterly. "It wouldn't have made any difference to me Geryl, I've always loved you, I knew it the first day I saw you in Vartha's throne room. It went back a lot further than that, in dreams that I thought were only dreams . . . And now it's too late."

His voice trailed off. A sound had caught his ear. A soft scraping sound. He twisted around and in the same instant heard Geryl's sharp gasp.

The door had swept open and closed in almost the same instant. And Frav, a sneering smile on his face, stood facing them.

JON moved into a painful crouch, then froze. Frav had his sword in his scabbard but his right hand held a bulky piece of metal. It resembled a weird adaptation of a twentieth century pistol with a round twisted coil of wire in a bulging glassite cap on top. The barrel, a long, solid length of metal with a pin-point hole at the end, was pointed straight at him.

"So the Atlan guerillas are attacking tonight!" Frav said coldly. He shoved his right hand forward. "Don't be foolish enough to move, Calthon."

Beside Jon, the girl stared terrified. "Jon—he heard us—and that weapon—it's the electro gun!"

Frav smiled at her. "Quite right, Geryl. I did listen. And I found out what Vartha wants to know. The Atlans will have a nice reception waiting for them!" He switched his eyes to Jon. "This weapon I'm holding is a little surprise that even you didn't know about. It shoots a bolt of electrical force that kills instantly! We have a larger gun mounted on one of the walls, just waiting for an attack! By the time we are ready to

use the spheres—which will be very soon—every man in our forces will have one of these!" He pointed significantly.

Jon stared at him. "Now that you know — why don't you run like the stinking rat you are and warn Vartha?"

Frav stepped slowly forward. "All in good time. I have a score to settle with you, Calthon. I haven't forgotten that night in the hills. I swore I'd kill you. I'm going to."

Geryl shot to her feet. She stepped in front of Jon. "Frav! You wouldn't dare—my Uncle—"

"Your Uncle wants information. He sent me to get it. I've got it." His face twisted suddenly. "You were never meant for a Calthon, Geryl. If you'd change your mind about—"

Jon laughed harshly. "You're offering her her life in return for you. Not much of a bargain, is it!"

Frav reached out and pulled the girl aside. His face was pale with anger.

"That's the last thing you'll ever say, Calthon! The last thing!"

Jon saw the weapon stare out at him. He saw the whitening of Frav's finger along the side of the barrel.

"Frav! I've decided! I'll do anything you say! You're right Frav!"

He hesitated. And in that instant she walked toward him.

"Stay back, Geryl! After I finish Calthon—"

Then she had reached him. There was a smile on her face, an eagerness in her half parted lips that he mistook. And then suddenly the smile left her. A short desperate cry flew from her mouth and she flung herself on the weapon Frav held.

FRAV cried out sharply, trying to pull her from his arm. And in that instant Jon shot forward, a released

spring of fury. He hit the guard leader's knees and felt him crash down on top of him to the floor.

Even as Frav's body struck the stone floor, Jon twisted madly aside. His right arm swung up in a slashing arc and caught Frav in the pit of his stomach. Geryl had scrambled to her feet and kicked sharply at the guard leader's right hand.

Frav let out a cry of pain and the weapon flew from his fingers. Then, before Jon could move further, Frav had regained his feet. He leapt back swiftly, avoiding Jon's clutching fingers. A snarl left his lips as he tugged at his sword scabbard.

Jon was crouching again, unable to straighten in time. He saw Frav's arm sweep into the air, saw the flashing arc of the blade, and knew he couldn't dodge it. The blade swept down toward him.

There was a sharp sound. A sizzling blast of noise. Jon, his eyes fastened on the descending sword, saw the blade waver, stop in mid-air, and then clatter to the floor. Frav swayed on his feet, a shocked look of pain and surprise on his face. His hands shot toward his chest.

But there wasn't any chest. A huge black hole had taken its place, a sizzling black maw. Frav slumped to the floor and lay still.

Jon turned horrified eyes. Geryl stood a few feet away, her hands clutching the electro gun. The air around her was thick with the burnt smell of ozone. Her lips shook.

"I killed him! . . . I had to kill him, Jon. . . ."

John hurried over to her. He took the weapon from her trembling hands. His lips were grim. "I know it, Geryl. I know it."

She glanced wildly about. "What are we going to do?"

"We're going to get out of here while there's still time! Somebody must have heard the racket . . ." He gripped her arm hard. "I've got to reach the North gate before it's too late!"

She nodded. "Through the garden—it's the only place that won't be guarded!"

Jon pulled slowly on the door of the cell room. It came open. He jumped into the passageway outside, the weapon held tense and ready.

Down the hall two of Vartha's men were advancing. They let out a shout as they saw Jon.

Jon pressed the barrel of the gun. A ripping bolt of blue fire swept out ahead of him. It caught the two men in a sizzling blast of smoke and flames. They crumpled soundlessly, lifeless hulks.

"This way, quick!" Geryl sobbed behind him.

Jon followed. He was aware of twisting passages, a flight of winding steps, and then suddenly the cool night was around them. And with it the smell of flowers. The garden!

Then he became aware of dim shouts from behind. "The wall! We've got to get over it!" He told her urgently. She nodded, and then they were racing across the flower banks.

Jon dropped the weapon to the ground and helped the girl over the parapet. Behind him he heard running feet. He stooped, twisted, and sent blazing bolts into the shadows. There were short cries of pain and the scurrying of retreating footsteps.

Then Jon leaped at the parapet. He caught it with his free hand and swung one leg over the top. He could hear Geryl calling him anxiously from the other side.

He slid over the top. And for a moment he froze in stark despair. Far out beyond the edge of the city, over the foothills in the distance, the Moon

was peeping over the horizon.

And with it came another sound, the thunder of approaching horses, and the rising volume of still distant shouts. Drego! It was Drego attacking!

*And the gate was closed!*

## CHAPTER IX

JON hit the ground with a numbing shock. The girl was beside him, tugging fearfully at his arm.

"Jon—it's too late! We can never reach the gate in time!"

He swore bitterly in the darkness as he fought to straighten out the turmoil that swam in his mind. It would be short minutes before the other half of the Atlan forces attacked the North gate—and they expected it to be open! With Vartha's electro gun mounted on top of the wall it would be a slaughter!

Behind them, Jan heard loud voices coming closer on the other side of the palace wall.

"We'll have to make a try for it!" he said grimly.

He could hear her labored breath close to his ear as he grabbed her hand. He sped toward the corner of the garden wall. Even as he reached it and the narrow street flanked with stone and metal buildings, he saw it was useless.

Above the distant din of battle at the city's edge, came the harsh clatter of a mounted patrol from the palace gate. Jon saw the glitter of vibro-swords in the dim light of the city's amber lamps set high in the walls of the buildings. Almost at the same instant a shout went up from the patrol.

Jon pulled the girl into the shadow of a nearby building. "They've seen us!" His voice sounded hollow and lifeless as he steadied his grip on the electro gun. Inwardly he knew there were too many. He might get a few of them before the speed of the mounted

attack reached them, but escape to the North gate was impossible.

The thunder of the approaching patrol grew in volume. Savagely Jon thrust the girl behind him. Then his hand tightened on the barrel of the electro gun.

Ripping blasts of flame tore through the narrow street. Screams of surprised pain rose above the blast of the gun. Jon saw horses careen to the ground, throwing their riders in lifeless arcs through the air. But the gaps filled as quickly as they opened, and the patrol thundered forward.

The weapon grew hot in Jon's hand. He could feel the palm of his hand singe and burn. But he held on grimly, pouring blast after blast into the crowding ranks before him.

"Jon! Quickly—in here!"

He felt a sudden tug on his arm. Risking death, Jon swung his eyes from the patrol. A metal door in the front of the building had opened and Geryl was inside, a group of men beckoning madly.

Jon gave a last look ahead. He sprayed the street with bolt after bolt from the heated gun, then jumped backward.

Almost before he cleared the opening, the door snapped shut. A tall hulking figure in peasant garments slammed bolts home.

"Follow us—do not ask questions!"

Jon stared in confusion. There were five of them, the tallest man, the one who had slammed the door shut, grabbed his arm, whispering the words urgently.

Already the patrol was storming the door. Jon shifted the electro gun to his left hand. "You're not any of Vartha's men!" he said cautiously.

The tall man nodded swiftly, his eyes darting to the vibrating door. "There's no time to talk—follow us!"

Jon looked over at Geryl. The girl was already following the first of the group down a long corridor. Jon gritted his teeth and followed.

IT WAS all a haze of motion. It seemed unreal, like the figments of a wild nightmare. The fight with Frav in the palace, the narrow escape through the garden, the doomed attack of Drego's forces outside the city, what seemed certain death a few moments before in the street outside, and now being snatched from the jaws of hell—to what?

Ahead one of the men threw open a door. They tumbled out into the night again, and Jon saw that they were in a small alleyway running in back of the building.

It was almost pitch black in the passage. Jon felt rather than saw where he was going. Behind him the tall man was guiding him with his hand at his back.

"We must hurry!"

Again the words hissed into Jon's ear. Then ahead he heard the others suddenly halt. Miraculously a door slid open in the rear of a towering building. Light streamed out into the alleyway. Then they were inside.

The tall man shut the door quickly behind them.

Jon stared around him in abrupt confusion. He was standing in a large room, filled with grim faced men. Some of them held vibro-swords, some held metal bludgeons, all of them had the appearance of men looking for a fight. He noticed Geryl moving close beside him.

Then the tall man strode into the center of the room. He faced Jon.

"You are Jon Calthon—the son of Baltu Calthon?"

Jon nodded, his eyes still switching from one man to another.

"That—" the tall man pointed to the girl, "is Ogar Vartha's niece?"

Jon felt Geryl stiffen beside him. He raised the electro gun protectingly.

The tall man shook his head. "You need not worry, we are friends. If you were willing to risk your life for her, we ask no questions. We want to help."

Jon lowered his weapon. He frowned. "I don't understand."

Geryl gripped his arm. "Jon—these men are citizens of Atlan City—I've seen some of them before!"

Jon's heart leapt. He turned to the tall man. "Do you know what's happening outside the city walls?"

The tall man nodded. "Yes, the loyal Atlan forces are attacking. We knew that you had returned in the strange machine and that Vartha had captured you. We also know of your raid on the prison. We have been organizing secretly for many months undercover, hoping for a chance to strike against Vartha. The whole city is ready to rise!"

Hope soared through Jon. He moved forward and in quick sentences explained the plan of attack. He finished with:

"Every second counts. Vartha has an electro gun mounted at the North gate—and I've failed to carry out my part. Our forces will be cut down unless we can act swiftly!"

The tall man wheeled abruptly and gave swift orders to the men behind him. Almost instantly they began leaving, their faces eager masks as they clutched vibro-swords and bludgeons. Seconds later only the original five remained. The tall man faced Jon grimly.

"I've given the necessary orders. In minutes every free man in Atlan City will attack Vartha's guards at the walls. We are prepared to die fighting."

Jon smiled harshly. "We may all have to. Our one chance is in reaching



the North gate before our forces outside are annihilated. Are you game?"

The tall man grinned. "It is suicide, but we are ready." Then he frowned. "The girl. . . ."

Jon sucked in his breath. He had forgotten about her. He turned to Geryl. "You'll wait here. After we return—"

"I'm coming with you!"

Jon shook his head definitely. "You're staying here. You'd only hinder us—" He left the words hanging, brutal words that were necessary.

"I'll have one of my men stay with her." The tall man cut in. "We'll have to hurry."

Jon caught the girl in his arms in a sudden fierce embrace. He crushed his lips to hers for a brief instant. Then he released her, feeling the wet tears of her eyes against his cheek.

"Let's go."

THROUGH narrow alleys, across streets choked with running men, thundering with the clash of mounted patrols and rebelling Atlan citizens, Jon and the four men sped.

It was a scene of havoc, a running avalanche of blood that threatened to stain the night itself. And above the din of fierce battles around them, Jon heard a sound growing louder with every step. It was a sizzling blast of sound, a ripping roar of it. His heart chilled, for he knew what it was—the electro gun mounted on the North gate wall—pouring death into the guerilla forces beneath it!

They came to the end of the last street, and pulled up short.

A hundred yards ahead lay the girding wall of the city. And the sight that met Jon's eyes chilled his last hope. A solid phalanx of mounted troops stood between them and the gate. Vartha's mounted guards were cutting down the

surging wave of Atlan citizens as they tried desperately to reach the walls. And on top of the wall was the electro gun, spitting jagged bolts of electrical force into the guerilla forces outside the wall!

"We can never reach the gate!" The tall man shouted in Jon's ear. "That weapon on the wall—if they turn it on us—"

A wild laugh flew from Jon's lips. He suddenly knew what he was going to do, what he had to do!

He broke away from the four men and dashed forward into the thick of the melee. He could hear the men shouting at him from behind, but he kept going.

A group of Vartha's guards wheeled from the line around the gate and charged into the mass of citizens. Jon was caught in the maelstrom as the horses charged down on him.

He raised the electro gun in his hand. Bolts of flame leapt from it, straight into the closely grouped riders. Half of them fell kicking to the ground, the rest turned in panic.

The wall was fifty yards away. Jon knew he couldn't get any closer. But it was close enough.

He raised the electro gun and aimed carefully at the top of the wall. Then it was spitting death into the night.

His eyes saw the jagged streak of blue flame lick out from the barrel—straight toward the electro gun over the gate!

It struck the larger weapon in a blasting song of flame.

And the world seemed to explode.

In a thunderous detonation, the electro gun exploded on top of the wall. The night was torn asunder by a blast that knocked Jon to his knees. He fell flat on his face and his own gun flew from nerveless fingers. Then around him the air was suddenly filled with pieces of stone and twisted shredded bodies.

When the blast subsided Jon raised his eyes fearfully. A cry trembled on his lips.

*A huge jagged hole had been blown in the wall!*

PIECES of rock were still falling around Jon when he clambered to his feet, staring in shocked awe toward the wall. He noticed a number of things all at once. The solid phalanx of Vartha's guards before the wall was gone! He could see the kicking shadows of wounded horses and men, lying scattered in small heaps. And through the gap in the stone wall he saw piles of silent bodies on the grass plains. Good Lord—Drego's forces!

Jon was aware of the sudden silence of battle around him. The shock of the exploding electro weapon had riveted men in their tracks.

Then from outside the city a hoarse shout split the air.

*"Blood of Atlans! The wall—attack!"*

Life spurred into Jon with that cry. He would have known it anywhere! It was Drego!

He scooped a fallen vibro-sword from the ground and rushed forward as a host of mounted guerillas swarmed through the stone gap. In their fore rode a tall massive figure, swinging a sword over his head.

"Drego!" Jon shouted.

The horseman wheeled up beside him.

"Jon! By my blood, lad, we were nearly done for! That cursed gun on the wall—"

Jon snatched the reins of a riderless horse and swung into the saddle. The guerilla fighters continued to pour through the gap.

"My father, Drego, where—"

"Jon! We thought you were dead!" Baltu Calthon pulled his horse along-

side them.

Jon breathed a sigh of relief. He turned swiftly to Drego.

"The people of the city have joined us! We'll head for the palace—Mad-dox has rebuilt the sphere, they're ready to act!"

Drego swore loudly and shouted orders to his men. Above his voice rose a wild cheering din. Jon stared as hundreds of the Atlan citizens rushed toward them.

Then suddenly the thunder of horses beat down on them from the center of the city. A solid wave of Vartha's men rode toward them!

The guerilla forces swept forward. Everything faded from Jon's mind in that moment but the deafening clash of battle. The guerillas tore into the Atlord's forces with flashing swords. Jon was dimly aware of his own arm slashing, hacking, his breath whistling in short gasps, his horse slipping, wheeling, turning.

Hoarse screams rose on all sides. Vartha's men gave under the onslaught. There was no stopping the battle mad waves of Atlan guerillas.

Slowly the Atlord's forces turned back, then, as if a mighty dam had been loosened, they turned and fled.

"To the palace! Blood of Atlans!" Jon heard Drego roar. But already Jon was lashing his horse in pursuit.

IT SEEMED as if years had passed when finally the palace walls rose into sight. Jon saw a furious battle taking place around it. The last remnants of Vartha's men had reached the stronghold and were being cut to pieces by hundreds of revolting citizens. The main gate to the courtyard was a milling mass of battle. Jon pulled his horse to a halt.

Drego and Baltu Calthon reined in beside him.

"By my blood!" Drego shouted. "We'll never be able to get through that mob!"

Then Jon suddenly remembered. "The garden wall! It's our only chance! Follow me!"

He wheeled his horse through the narrow street off to the left. Behind him Drego and his father led a shouting mass of Atlan horsemen.

Jon's eyes were on a level with the top of the garden wall. He could see racing figures in the courtyard beyond, and something else. Resting in the middle of the courtyard was a huge glistening metal globe. *It was the sphere!*

Baltu Calthon saw it at the same moment. His voice reached Jon's ears.

"Jon! The sphere—Maddox rebuilt it!"

Jon shouted over his shoulder as he grabbed the edge of the parapet. "Your plans didn't fool him—he used a larger gyro!"

Then he was over the wall, landing in the tumble of bushes beside it. He paused only long enough to help his father to the ground, Baltu Calthon was shouting something at him, but Jon couldn't catch his words. Drego and a score of Atlan fighters were already swarming into the garden.

A cry went up from the courtyard as Vartha's men saw them coming. Jon drew his sword from his belt and ran forward beside Drego.

"Blood of Atlans—you swine!" the guerilla chief thundered.

Then they had reached the latticed arch entering into the courtyard. A swarm of Atlord guards tried to block the entrance. But they might just as well have tried to stop a rushing tornado.

Jon's vibro-sword lashed out into the nearest man. Before he could pull the blade back, he was shoved forward in

a surge from behind. Drego, roaring at the top of his lungs, charged into the compact mass of guards, the Atlan fighters close at his heels.

It was over almost as soon as it began. The remnants of the guards threw down their swords in surrender. Drego's men hustled them into close bunches and shoved them back through the garden archway.

Then Jon saw his father.

Baltu Calthon lay on the flagstone slabs, his side a welling flow of blood.

"Dad!" Jon cried out. He knelt trembling beside the stricken figure.

"Vartha . . . Maddox . . . the sphere . . . Jon . . ." Words bubbled from his lips.

Jon glanced helplessly up at Drego as the guerilla chief came up.

"Blood of—" The words chopped off in mid-air. A hoarse scream split the courtyard. A high pitched scream—the voice of a woman!

Jon staggered to his feet blindly. His eyes caught the huge sphere in the center of the courtyard, *and three figures running toward it!*

"Geryll!" Jon cried out.

IT WAS the girl! She was screaming and kicking as Ogar Vartha dragged her toward the sphere! In front of them, Karl Maddox had already reached it and was clambering through a dark opening in its side!

Jon gripped the hilt of his sword and leaped forward. He had covered half the distance when Vartha reached the sphere. The Atlord stopped and pulled the girl in front of him. His free hand shot up holding an electro gun!

Time stood still as Jon's mind sped. He knew what was coming. The barrel of the electro gun was centering on him. In seconds a ripping blast would tear his life out.

"Geryll! Hit the ground!" he

shouted.

In the same instant he dove forward, his arm slashing outward in a vicious arc. The sword left his hand spinning through the air. Ahead of him, the girl had wrenched herself forward to the ground.

It happened all at once. There was a ripping sizzle of heat and flame that shot over Jon's shoulder. Then the sword struck Ogar Vartha.

It caught him high on the shoulder, driving him backward. The electro gun flew from his fingers and clattered to the floor of the courtyard. In front of him, Geryl was staggering away on her hands and knees.

Jon felt a triumphant cry welling in his throat as he dashed forward. But before he could reach the sphere, Vartha staggered against its side. Maddox reached out and pulled him into the opening. Jon caught a single glimpse of his face. There was rage and hatred written there.

"We'll be back! We'll be back!" Maddox shouted.

Then Jon reached the sphere. But he was too late. The opening closed as a metal section of the wall slid into place.

In almost the same instant the huge globe shuddered. Jon jumped back just in time.

A rising whine of sound vibrated on the night wind. And with it the sphere trembled. Like a bird weary of flight but forced to spread its wings, the sphere rose into the air.

Jon watched it and tears of anger slipped from his eyes. They had failed! In the very moment of triumph they had failed! Vartha and Maddox were free—free in the time sphere—free to gather forces in some distant time among gullible men—free to return—free to conquer!

The sphere rose higher in the night. The Moon shed its silver light on the

glistening metal body, heard the rising whine of it as it spun higher in the heavens. Heard, saw, and could not flee in the cloudless sky.

In weird fascination Jon followed it with his eyes. Around him silence descended. He knew that other eyes, the eyes of Drego, his father, Geryl, were watching it too. Watching it with despair in their hearts.

THE sob rose in a crescendo. Jon knew what was coming. It was the prelude, the overture to the finale. When Maddox threw the switch inside the sphere, the forces of space would disrupt, the sphere would vanish, fade into the protecting limbo of time.

But it didn't fade.

There was a sound that human ears had never heard. The very air seemed to twist, tremble, and disrupt. The metal globe seemed to dilate in the sky. A shrieking siren of sound, an astral protest split the heavens around it.

And the sphere exploded.

It burst into a million tiny fragments. It showered its atoms into the night wind, a final shimmering blast of light.

Then there was quiet.

With leaden feet Jon strode back across the courtyard. He stood in silent shock before the figure of Baltu Calthon, lying in a growing pool of blood on the stone ground.

"The sphere . . . Jon . . . Maddox . . . guessed wrong . . . shouldn't have used . . . larger gyro . . . set up force field against . . . space warp . . . resistance too great . . . caused explosion. . . ."

The words of his father fell on Jon's ears. He heard them as he knelt beside the wounded body. "Father! . . ."

A weak smile crossed the old man's face. A fleeting smile, the last vestige of strength left in his tired body. Around him, Drego and the Atlan men

watched silently. And Jon felt Geryl slip to his side.

"My son . . . Atlans your responsibility . . . you and . . . Geryl . . . forget . . . time sphere . . . rebuild . . . people . . . Jon . . ."

He was dead. The tired aching eyes were closed. His lips stilled forever.

Jon rose. Beside him Geryl was sobbing. Drego had turned his eyes away.

"Jon! Oh, Jon!" she cried.

And then she was in his arms, her head nestled against his shoulder. "I

couldn't wait for you Jon, I was afraid . . . I ran from the building and some of my Uncle's men found me . . . They killed the man you left with me, and brought me here! He was using me as a shield against you . . . It was terrible! . . ."

Jon looked off into the night. The stars were bright and twinkling in the sky. And the wind suddenly echoed the cheers that rose from the city. They were shouting his name. He could hear them.

And he was glad.



## SCIENCE ODDITIES



### THE HUMAN SPARE PARTS BANKS

**I**NSPIRED by the life saving features of the blood banks, medical science has begun developing banks in which to store spare parts of the human body. These spare parts are for surgical use in cases of emergency.

Thousands of sightless persons have been waiting patiently for the extremely delicate operation that will enable them to see again. The difficulty has been to obtain eyes.

Occasionally some person executes a will leaving his eyes to science. But there never have been enough eyes to supply the demand.

The hospitals of New York City have established the world's first eye bank. The eyes are stored in the plasma bank at proper temperature until needed. Eyes of stillborn babies can be used, but the main source of supply is expected to be adult donors.

Severed nerves are one of the surgeons' most difficult problems during war time. Unless the nerves can be mended, the patient will be crippled. Dr. Paul Weiss of the University of Chicago developed a technique for instantaneously freezing sections of freshly removed nerves, dehydrating them in a high vacuum and storing them in sealed sterile containers.

According to Russian reports, wartorn arms and legs are restored to complete usefulness by using preserved nerve fragments, removed from the bodies of their own battle casualties.

Quick-frozen sections of veins have greatly reduced amputation of the arms and legs. Doctors believe that banks for frozen veins will be standard in postwar hospitals.

Doctors recently have been trying to perfect means to preserve cartilage taken from the dead. Preserved cartilage has had a tendency to break down and become absorbed.

At present it appears that a cartilage bank will be an important adjunct to the reconstruction of World War II facial disfigurements.

### PROLONGING MAN'S PRIME

**M**ANY men become dismayed during mid-life by an insidious sapping of their vitality. Some plagued by ills crumble into premature old age; others come back to vigor from this crisis.

The discovery of a new synthetic hormone, testosterone, suggests possibilities for a new lease on life for men sapped out between the ages of 50 and 75, but their doctors must determine that they are suffering from male hormone deficiency.

Several medical discoveries have been proved myths. The science of pathology warned the hopeful hunters that old age is utterly inevitable.

In 1934, a Swiss chemist, Ruzicka, prepared male hormones synthetically in his laboratory. Today a limitless source material of male hormone is available in cholesterol, found in the spinal cords and brains of cattle.

Scores of experiments were performed with animals before the new drug was tried on human beings. Animals injected with it showed an upsurge of their stamina.

The muscles of man sag when their day's work is just beginning; their skin is thin like a fine tissue; wrinkled and discolored, their hope for tomorrow fades into despondency. For these broken men, injections of the new male hormone began a physical and mental resurrection.

Male hormone treatments should always be guided by a skilled physician. The power of this vital chemical, testosterone, may cause older men to feel too young and excessive doses may stimulate them to overexercise or overwork, with consequent bad effects upon the heart and blood vessels.

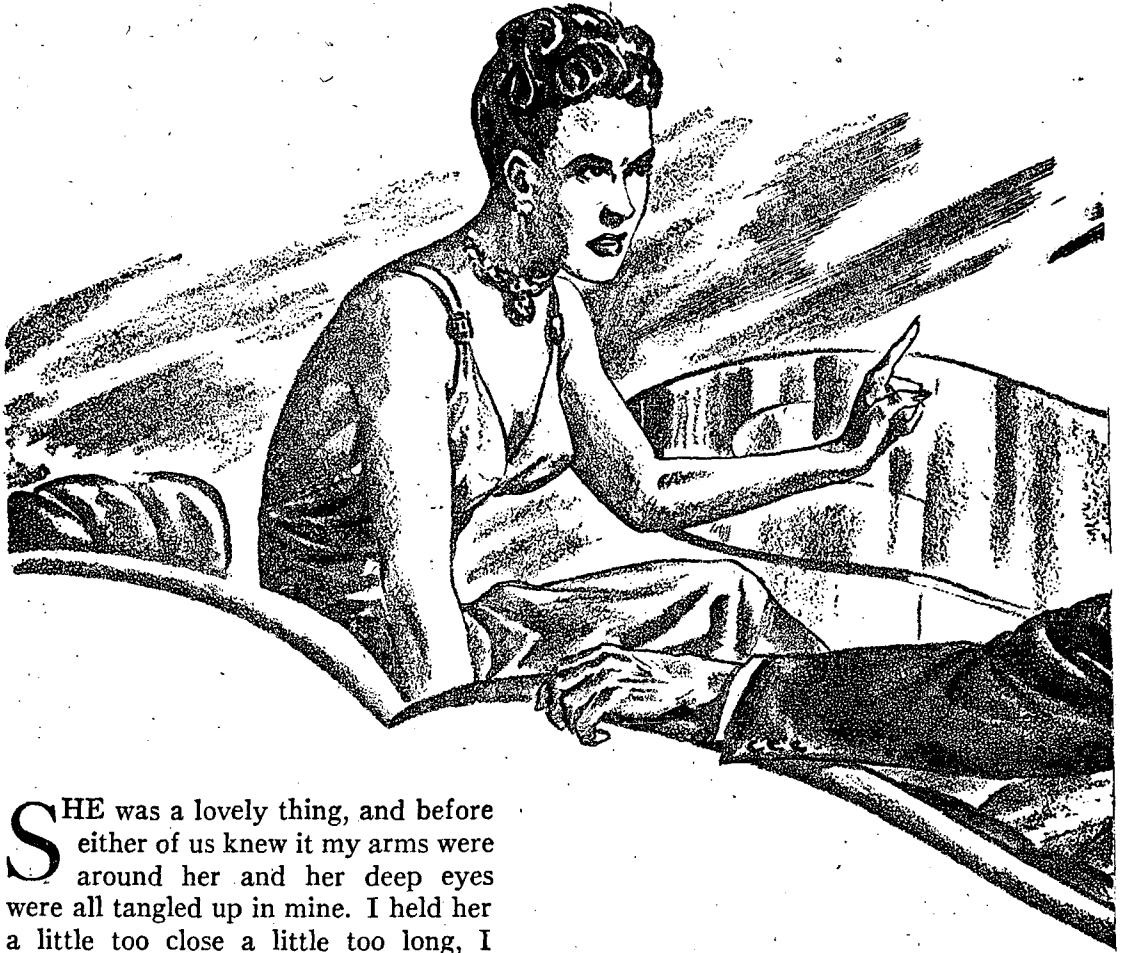
Testosterone can be administered either orally or by hypodermic injections. One of the barriers to the widespread use of this drug has been its prohibitive cost. But increased production will in time lower the cost of hormones until it is within reach of every man who needs it.—Pete Bogg.



# BLABBERMOUTH

by Theodore Sturgeon

There's an old saw about women who hang over the back fence. Maria wasn't like that—her tongue wagged everywhere!



SHE was a lovely thing, and before either of us knew it my arms were around her and her deep eyes were all tangled up in mine. I held her a little too close a little too long, I guess; she squirmed away, got her balance and brushed me off like so much pretzel-juice.

"Sorry," I lied.

A winged eyebrow went up as two heavy lids went down. "That's all right," she said. Her voice like the sound of a cello whispering in the low

register. "But you really ought to signal for a turn." I'd been trying to whip in front of a rotund individual who was about to climb into the taxi I wanted to get, and in doing so had almost knocked the girl off her feet. She turned away just in time to miss the practiced click of my heels as I tipped



"Go ahead, tell them!" the little poltergeist howled in her ear

my hat. I sighed and flagged another cab. I had a lot of friends and knew a lot of glamour, and until this minute I had flattered myself on having a pretty picturesque string of 'em in my little black book. But now—well, I could only wish I had seen her somewhere before. She reminded me of someone I used to know a few years back, when I really was a bigshot. Instead of running an all-night radio program and writing feature articles on the side, I used to be a Power. I was in high-school and managed the basketball team. I cut a lot of ice and a lot of corners.

I stepped into the cab and gave the address of the restaurant where I was supposed to meet Sylvia. That was a date I'd worked hard to get, and now for some strange reason, I had little stomach for it. I stared out of the side window as the taxi drew past the girl I'd just run into. She was walking slowly, apparently looking at something beautiful two miles away and two hundred feet up, and there was an entrancing half-smile on her face. Her hair was long and black and it turned under just about where her straight back started to make her waist so slim; I'd never seen hair like that, but there was something about the strong, clean curve of her jaw and the way the inside corners of her eyes were lower than they should be—

"Stop!" I screamed to the cabbie. He must have thought that I was about to have some kind of an attack. He was wrong, then. I had already had the attack but it had just now hit me. Anyway, he did a dollar and a half's worth of damage to his brake linings, took the dollar I threw at him as I dived out, and went his unprofitable way.

I ran to her, caught her elbow. "Hey! I—"

"Ah," she contraltoed. "My friend

the Juggernaut."

"Amend that," I said quickly. "Your very dear friend Eddie Gretchen."

"Oh?" said her eyebrow, and she said, "And when and where did Eddie Gretchen become my very dear friend?"

"Damfino," I said, and we began walking. By glancing at me without turning her head, she conveyed the general idea that we were walking the same way but not together. "That's for you to figure out," I went on, "and in all sincerity I wish you would. I know you. I used to circulate around you like a bloodstream. But I honestly can't remember when it happened. You're a dream that got broken up by an alarm clock. Come on now—you have my face and you have my name. What do they mean to you?"

"I was never married to you," she said distantly, "So I haven't your name. And I don't want your face."

"With a face like yours," I said, "I can't blame—"

She actually smiled at me. "You haven't changed a bit, Eddie."

I glowed for a second and then realized that she didn't intend to help any. "All right—when was it?"

"The year Covina High beat your Filthy Five 48 to 17."

"It was 48 to 19," I said furiously, "And they were the Fighting Five."

"They were filthy," she said, and laughed richly.

"Fighting," I growled. "And besides, the referees—hey! You're not Underhanded Mazie?"

"I am not! No one knows me well enough to call me that! I'm Maria Undergaard—Miss Undergaard to you, Mr. Gretchen."

"Aha! Er—Mazie, m'love, what was it they called the team?"

"The Fighting Five," she acknowl-

edged.

"Okay, Maria." I took her arm happily.

"But they were filthy," she muttered. I let it go at that.

WE FOUND a table off the avenue on which to hook our elbows and gab. I don't think I took my eyes from her once in three hours. It was unbelievable. When I had first met her, she'd been a refugee from one of the low countries, in this country about four years. She had, then, an utterly charming clipped accent, which was now replaced by beautifully schooled diction—the pluperfect English achieved only by those who have thoroughly learned it as a strange language. Ah, she'd been a killer-diller in her school days. She'd always had an odd seriousness about her, a deep and unwavering intensity; and my strongest memory of her was the sleepless night I spent after our first—and only—date. It was all wonderment. I wondered what a girl like that would ever develop into. I wondered how in blue hell she had kept me at a respectable distance all evening without using her hands. And most of all I wondered at the overwhelming sense of satisfaction I had got out of it. I never spoiled that satisfaction by asking for another date—it was too complete. For the kind of wild Indian I used to be, that was quite something. And now here she was, telling me how she had inherited a little money after she graduated, had spent four years at a small college up on the Lakes, and had been studying herself myopic ever since.

"Studying what?"

She looked at me oddly. "Spiritism. Psychic manifestations. Possession, more than anything else. I've read a million books and barked up a million wrong trees, but I—think I proved

what I thought all along."

"What?"

"That possession is an established fact. That anyone can be possessed. That I myself can be possessed."

"I'd like to be sure of that," I said. She took it the nice way, though her eyes told me that she hadn't missed anything. "Psychic possession is a very strange thing. But it is not strange in the way you might think. I'm sure you've read stories—books, articles—about it. How spirits drift about in and among us, how, as elementals and familiars, they sometimes take possession; causing us to do things completely alien to ourselves. Well, it isn't like that at all. It isn't psychic—it's psychological. I have proof of that." As she spoke her eyes began to wander and her voice to fade and come in strong with her wavering gaze. She seemed to be struggling desperately to keep her attention on what she was saying; but it seemed as if she were being distracted by some conversation inaudible to me. "Did you know that a vibrating string never gives off the fullest tone unless it has a sounding board back of it? The 'spirit' that possesses people is like that. My vibrating string in the analogy is the source of that spirit—a mind emanating suspicion. The sounding board is —" She broke off, looking over her shoulder at the woman who sat alone at the next table. I'd noticed her before, because of the remarkable viciousness of her expression, and the brittle politeness of the man who had sat there with her. They seemed to be a little bit married and finding it quite a strain. Maria half rose, glanced at me, and with an effort sat down again.

"What's the matter—don't you feel well?" I asked.

"Oh no—no, I'm perfectly all—I was just . . ." She sipped at her drink,



glanced over her shoulder again, took a deep breath, smiled at me.

"Someone you know?" I queried.

She shook her head. "Where was I?"

"You were here with me, looking very lovely, and you had just told me that the possessing spirit is in reality an emanation of suspicion."

"Oh. Well, it has its sounding board in a mind which bears a guilty conscience. Suspicion and guilt; when the two of them combine, they form a very powerful psychological entity, which is actually the thing which possesses a mind opened to it."

"Sounds very involved and not overly important to me," I said, scratching my ear. "Now that you've got it, what's it get you?"

She shrugged. "What good is any knowledge, once achieved? Maybe some day someone cleverer than I will find out how to use what I have learned. As far I'm concerned, I've learned all I—care to about it." She looked at me; there was something behind that statement and the poignant glance that went with it. She was smooth, svelte; the most equable and poised human being I had ever seen; and yet under that knee-action armor she wore was a pleading, little-girl kind of terror at something she couldn't understand. It didn't fit. It didn't make sense. It made me frightened, too, a little, and hugely anxious to share it with her, whatever it was. No matter *what* it was!

She giggled suddenly. I said "Huh?"

"I just thought of something, Eddie. You were in an awful rush when you swept me off my feet on the Avenue. Whatever became of that appointment you had to keep?"

"OH, that. Well, I—*holy smoke!*" I leaped up, a horrible picture of

Sylvia sitting in a restaurant for three hours, waiting for me, wafted through my mind. I excused myself to Maria's laughing face and hightailed for a phone. Halfway there it occurred to me that Maria had come out with her little reminder with peculiar suddenness. One phone booth was occupied, I noticed, by the frozen-faced gentleman lately from the table next to ours. He was ogling into the phone with a real genuine sugar-candy ogle. I hate guys like that. I slid into the next booth, dialed. While I was waiting for my connection I glanced back at my table. Maria wasn't there. I froze. This was dandy. Call up one babe to fix a stand-up while another was doing precisely the same thing to me.

I got helloed at through the receiver and asked to have Sylvia paged. Sitting back to wait, I looked out again. I'd been wrong. Maria hadn't gone. She was over at the next table, talking earnestly to the basilisk who sat there. I felt my eyebrows go up. What did she mean by lying to me about not knowing those people? And why lie about it?

I could see even at that distance how the woman's face was lowering and setting as Maria spoke swiftly in her ear. When her countenance had achieved the general lines of the bulbous bow on a battleship, she got up and started over toward the phones. I had an impulse to pop into the next booth and warn the man in there that she was coming, but I didn't want to miss my call. Just as she reached the booths and plastered her ear against the glass, I heard Sylvia's voice in my receiver. "Hello?"

"Sylvia? This is Eddie Gretchen."

"Ah. Eddie Gretchen. I wish I didn't know you well enough to remember your name. Where have you been?"



Where are you?"

"It was this way," I said gently. "An old friend of mine is in trouble. I just had to lend a hand—couldn't help myself." That's true enough, I thought, and anyway, she's not listening to me.

"Too bad," she said bitterly. "Meanwhile I've waited for two and a half hours in a restaurant where I'm not known, in which I have eaten a substantial lunch and from which I have secured a pack of expensive cigarettes, and to which I have brought no money. I am to assume that you will not be here?"

"Oh, Sylvia, I can't possibly. About the check, put the manager on. He knows me. I can fix that. And Sylvia—I'm terribly sorry. I—" but she had put down the receiver. In a moment the manager's voice came over. I explained the situation, got his okay, and asked for Sylvia.

"I'm sorry," said the manager. "The lady seemed—well, miffed. Definitely miffed. She said to tell you not to hold your finger down your throat until you hear from her again, because you'll sure digest it off. Heh heh."

"HEH heh," I mimicked, and hung up. I stepped out of the booth into the messiest piece of publicized domesticity I had ever seen. It was the woman Maria had spoken to. She was just in the act of bursting into the next booth. Piling in practically on top of the hapless man inside, she gave vent to her emotions in a screaming false alto.

"You moth-eaten old Billygoat! How dare you leave me sitting alone in a fourth-rate dive while you call up that sleazy little tramp? Take your hand away from the mouthpiece, you crumb. Let her hear me. Here—get away. (Into the phone.) Listen, you home-

wrecker. If you want my filthy husband you can have him. But you just better think it over. If you want his money, he hasn't any. I haven't had a new dress in six months, although I'll bet you have, you—ah, she hung up." She banged the receiver violently onto its hook and turned to her palsied spouse. "Things have come to a pretty pass," she shrieked, "When total strangers can walk up to me and tell me about your goings-on! You—"

Along about then she began to repeat herself, and my interest dwindled. I pushed my way through the crowd that had collected, and went back to Maria. She sat with her head bowed, and I really don't think she knew I had returned until I was seated and spoke to her.

"Maria—"

"Oh! Eddie—" with a bright, phony smile, "did you get it fixed up all right?"

"Yeh." I sat looking at her somberly. "You did, too."

"What?" all innocence.

"Fixed something up all right. I hate to pry, Mazie, but you just caused a hell of a stink over there. What was the idea of tipping that woman off that her husband was daddying some sugar over the phone? How did you know what he was up to in the first place? And why the devil did you tell me you didn't know those people?"

She was a little panicked. Her eyes went wide, and she reached over and clutched my wrist. She didn't know it, but her touch on my arm clinched any argument, forever and ever. As long as she held me that way, looked at me that way, she was right; I was wrong. "Please don't be angry, Eddie. I hoped you hadn't noticed. No, I didn't lie to you. I never saw them before. How did I know what was going on? I just—knew, Eddie. Please

believe me—please don't catechize me! Will you forget it—just this once? I'll try not to let it happen again! Truly I will, Eddie!"

I tried to grin those bright tear-stars out of her eyes. I put one fist under her chin, punched it gently, shaking my head. "Sure, Maria. Sure. Heck—it was nothing. Skip it."

Why I hadn't sense enough to tie the incident up with her theory of possession, I'll never know.

THE fourth time I saw her I proposed. That was three hours after the third time, which was one day after the second time, which was five solid weeks after the first time. Yes, it took five weeks for me to persuade her to entrust herself to me for an evening after that occasion in the little bar off the Avenue. Twice she almost cried over the phone, and after that she laughed it off; and when she had run out of reasons for not seeing me she broke down and confessed that it was because she was afraid she would embarrass me the same way again. I had to tell her that in the first place I hadn't been embarrassed and in the second place I didn't give a damn about its happening again; I just wanted to see her. It wasn't until I threatened to walk out of a window at the studio that she finally made that second date. Eighty-seven floors is a long way, and I meant what I said.

She always insisted on going to places where we'd be more or less alone, whether it was in a hansom cab in Central Park or a walk over the Brooklyn Bridge. That suited me so well I didn't bother to wonder about it. But she'd go to any lengths to avoid being with me and strangers at the same time. So it was there in the park, at four o'clock in the afternoon on the day I'd rolled out of bed early to take her

to lunch, that I proposed. It was easy. I just held both her hands and felt afraid to look into her eyes when I said, "Hey. We got to get married."

And she smiled her very own smile and nodded. I kissed her. When a passing cop grinningly broke it up, she straightened her hat, patted the back of my hand and shook her head. "I wouldn't marry you, Eddie," she said quietly. My blood turned to salt water and began to ooze coldly out of my pores. I didn't have to ask her to say it again because she did. Then she stood up. "Let's get out of here, Eddie." One of my arms went up and yanked her back down on the bench. I stared woodenly at some kids who were feeding the ducks down on the lake.

"For a minute I was scared," I said. My voice hurt me. "I thought you said you wouldn't marry me."

"I did, Eddie."

"Yeah." I turned to her and when she saw my face she lifted her hands a little and shrank back. "Why?" I asked. "Single, aren't you?"

She nodded. "It's something that—Eddie, will you take my word for it—just this once?"

"No," I said, "I already took your word for something 'just this once.' Spill it."

"It's—about the things I studied. I spent a month or so by myself up in the mountains not long ago—did I tell you? I didn't see a soul for forty-two days. I was always susceptible to what has been called the psychic. Up there, I studied, and I tried out a lot of things, and experimented a lot. That was when I got on the right track. About possession, I mean. I found out how to open my mind to possession. I went too far. I held it open too long. It—grew that way. I can't close it. I'm a permanent susceptible, Eddie."

When I came down from the mountains I was different. I always will be."

"What the hell's this all about?" I snarled. "Do you love me?"

"You don't have to ask me that," she whispered. I looked at her. I didn't have to ask her. I put my arms around her and said, with my teeth on the lobe of her ear. "Tell the rest of that nonsense to your husband on your honeymoon."

The cop came along again. I thumbed at the lake over my shoulder and told him to go jump in it. He went away laughing.

**D**IFFERENT she might have been, but her only difference was in being better, finer, sweeter than any other woman on earth. That's what I believed after our honeymoon. I believe it now, with an amendment. Then, I thought that what I just said covered everything. Since, I learned a little more. Maria did have a profound difference from other women.

It didn't show up until we came back to the city and I got back on the air again. I had a nice stretch, and she adjusted herself to it gracefully. I m.c.'d an all-night radio program from two to seven in the morning, which meant getting up around four and breakfasting at suppertime. Great stuff. That way you're fresh and ready to go in the evening when everyone else who has to work for a living is tired out from a day's work. Before I got married I had a thousand friends and a thousand places to go every night. Afterward, I couldn't see why Maria shouldn't go to at least five hundred of them with me. She didn't like the idea. Acted afraid of it. I kidded her and swore at her and annoyed her and persuaded her. "A guy like me has to have friends," I said. "Look. My program has sponsors. As long as people wire

in requests for phonograph records, the sponsors know that if they're hearing the music they can't very well avoid the plugs. They renew their contracts and that's what gives me nickels and dimes to buy you ice-cream cones and automobiles and stuff. You'd be surprised how many people wire in from bars and restaurants, whether they know me personally or not, just because they saw me there during the evening. I got to get around. I can notice the slack-off already, when I've only been off the stem for a couple of weeks. Last night I played fifty-eight minutes of records and transcriptions without getting a single wire. That isn't good, babe."

And she kept saying, "Then go, Eddie. I'll be all right. I won't run away from you if you leave me alone for a few hours. Go see your friends." So I did. But it didn't work out. Those weren't stag parties I was going to. The babes all knew I was married, and when they saw me by myself all the time they got the wrong idea. A little bit of this, and I went home one night and laid down the law.

She didn't like it, but she didn't argue. She took an unconscionably long time to put on her face, but she came without a peep. I didn't expect that meekness. I told her so. She smiled without enthusiasm.

"I've asked you not to force me to come with you," she said sadly. "I guess you've just got to find out for yourself."

We started on West Fifty-second street and did it up pretty well. The evening netted us four dinner invitations, three pairs of tickets to shows on the stem, and a total of ninety-two telegrams on that night's program. Maria did me proud. There wasn't a lovelier or more charming woman under lights that night, and after the first half hour or

so she seemed to be enjoying it. When I tossed her into a cab in front of the studio at one-thirty, she grinned and squeezed my hand. "Maybe I was wrong, Eddie. I hope so anyway. But it was swell."

I WENT on up to the studio, feeling all warm inside, and it wasn't the high-balls either. Jakie Feltner was winding up the "Hits at Home" stretch, two hours of records of bands playing currently in New York spots, with a background of transcribed night-club chatter to make the unwary listener think he was listening to the real thing. He gave me a peculiar look through the plate-glass as I went in, waved his hand toward my table. I threaded my way through the record-stacks and picked up the sheaf of early wires that fed out of the teletype by my microphone. As a favor to me, Jakie used to read off the one-thirty to two wires and stack up the first few releases for me while his own were being played. I gathered that he had come across a wire of particular moment. He had. Among the run-of-the-mill requests was this little gem, marked "Personal":

HEY EDDIE BETTER KEEP THAT SHEMALE SHERLOCK YOU MARRIED OUT OF POWDER ROOMS OR SHE'LL WIND UP MINUS AN EYE. SHE WENT OVER FIVE WOMEN IN THERE ONE AFTER ANOTHER, TOLD EACH ONE EXACTLY WHAT SHE WANTED TO KNOW. TOLD MY WIFE ABOUT THE RAISE I GOT TWO MONTHS AGO. I GOT TROUBLE SON. YOU LEAVE HER HOME NEXT TIME.

DUKE FROM DUBUQUE.

I read it over three times. The Duke was one of my steadies, who apparently went on a telegram binge every payday. I've seen him send twenty-eight in two

hours. I never did find out who he was, though he apparently saw me very often.

"Pretty, huh?" said Jakie, closing the soundproof door into the other section and coming over to me.

"Yeah," I said. "The guy's nuts." He looked over my shoulder at the Duke's wire. "Oh—that one. Could be. Maybe all these are nuts too." He riffled through the pile, tossed out three more wires.

DEAR EDDIE THERE CAME THE BRIDE AND THERE WENT THE DETAILS OF MY MONKEY-BUSINESS TO THE WAITING EARS OF THE WORLD. IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD A MUZZLE I'LL SEND YOU ONE. PLEASE PLAY "I'LL BE GLAD WHEN YOU'RE DEAD" AND DEDICATE IT TO YOUR WIFE.

A FRIEND.

HI, EDDIE SAW THE NEW MATA HARI ON FIFTY-SECOND STREET AND WAS TOLD SHE BELONGS TO YOU. WHO'D OF THOUGHT YOU'D WED A PUBLIC ENEMY? PLEASE PLAY "WHISPERING GRASS."

ANN ONYMOUS.

EDDIE: DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE TO TELL YOU AT THE TIME BUT I WISH YOU'D KEEP WHAT I TELL YOU UNDER YOUR HAT. YOUR WIFE TOLD BERGEN ABOUT MY MERGER WITH WILLIAMSON WHICH WAS DUE TOMORROW. THAT WILL COST ME ABOUT EIGHT THOUSAND. GUESS IT WASN'T MARIA'S FAULT BUT YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD HER TO KEEP QUIET ABOUT IT.

HARRY ELLIOTT.

They were all lousy but the last one hurt the most. Harry had been a friend of mine for years. Maria and

I had joined his crowd a couple of hours ago at Dave's place. Bergen and his wife were there. Bergen was Harry's A-number-one rival and competitor in the printing business. I'd known for quite some time that Harry had a deal coming up with the Williamson concern that would give him weight enough to drive Bergen underground. I gathered that now that the info had leaked out through Maria, Bergen had managed to bear down on Williamson and kill the merger. That was bad enough in itself; but imagine how I felt when I remembered that *I had positively not told Maria one word about Harry Elliott's affairs!*

Jakie said quietly, "Sorry, Eddie."

I looked at him. I felt my jaw flapping foolishly and waved him away. "Go' back to your turntables, Jakie. You're on the air—remember?"

"Yeh." He went to the door, turned to give me a long look, and then dashed for the mike as his number played itself out. Jakie was swell. He'd do anything for me, I knew, but there was nothing he could do about this.

How could Maria have done these things? If she had *why* did she? I could easily see how. Anyone who goes clubbing with me has to spend a lot of time by himself, because I know so damn many people. I'm always hopping from one table to another. While I was making the rounds, I guess Maria had been getting in her work.

"That—stinks," I said.

**L**ONG practice had taught me how to maintain a free-and-easy mike style no matter how I felt, no matter how much good luck or bad had piled into me before the show. Jakie put my theme on the table and the red light in front of me flashed on. I sat back mulling over the whole dirty business, and when the last chorus of

my theme faded, I grabbed the mike around the neck and went to work.

"Top o' the wee sma' to ye, boys and gals. This is the man behind the mike who makes all that talking noise between the music—Eddie Gretchen's the name. We're open for business till the sun comes up and stops us, and if there's any ol' thing you want to hear over the air, drop me a wire and tell me about it. Don't call me up because I haven't the intelligence to use a phone. Before I play you some transcriptions and stuff there's a little something on my mind, viz. and to wit: There's no law yet in this country against sending me personal wires while I'm working. It's fun for you and fun for me. But there's nothing funny about hitting below the belt. I just got a sheaf of that kind of thing and I don't feel so happy about it, boys and gals. I'm not saying to quit sending them, though. Oh no. But when you do, sign your names and addresses. If I find out that the information is phony, I might like to drop around and personally cave in some faces. Think it over while Tony Reddik's swell little band shows you and you how drums are really kicked around in 'Suitcase Shuffle.'" I spun the platter and let it go.

Well, it brought results. During the show I got fourteen more wires of that sort. I think all of that powder room crowd were represented. Some of them were funny and some of them were nasty and some were just hurt about it. I got my names and addresses too. Nine of them were women. It certainly seemed as if Maria had done the most vicious piece of blabbing I'd ever heard of. She told husbands about their wives and wives about their best friends. She broke up business deals and caused fistfights and broke up more than one otherwise happy couple. I



couldn't understand where she got all her information, or what on earth possessed her to spill it around. Possessed—possessed . . . the word did something to my brain. That was the thing she was always trying to tell me about. The reason she didn't want to mix with a crowd. I'd seen loose-tongued women before, but this particular woman—damn it! She was so restrained! Her every thought and movement was so perfectly controlled! Well, I thought sourly, she's going to have her chance to explain it all tonight. Every dirty lousy little bit of it.

SHE was asleep when I came in. I stood over her, wanting to kiss her, wanting to punch her lovely mouth, wanting to kick her teeth in, wanting to have her put her arms around me so I could cry on her shoulder. She must have sensed me near her. She put up her arms and smiled without opening her eyes. I took the telegrams out of my breast pocket and closed her fingers on them. Without a word I went into the bathroom and shut the door. As I peeled off my clothes and got into pajamas and a robe I heard her start to cry, and then be quiet again. When I went back she was lying with her face buried in the crumpled telegrams.

"I see you beat me to it," I said evenly. She turned her head ever so slightly, so that one dark eye regarded me piteously. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I was going to rub your nose in those wires myself."

She rolled over and sat up. Her face was scared and defiant, and not terribly apologetic. I hadn't expected any of that except the fear. "Don't say I didn't warn you," she said softly. "Don't say I didn't try and try to keep you from taking me to those places.

Don't say I didn't try to tell you about it even before we were married."

"My mistake for shutting you up. Go on—you have the floor."

"What do you expect me to say? I'm sorry?"

"Babe, that doesn't begin to cover it." I went over to her. My gums hurt, the way my jaw was clenched, driving the teeth into them. "I want the whole story. I want to know why you are such a lousy little blabbermouth, and how you got the dirt you threw around all night."

"Sit down," she said coolly, "or you'll get a seizure and fall down."

Her eyes were very wide, and that dark something in them that had chilled me on the day we met was there. I crossed the room and sat. She began to talk in a low voice.

"I was possessed last night, Eddie. Not once, but time and time again. Oh, you're so stupid sometimes! I knew this was going to happen—I knew it, but you had to be so bullheaded and—oh, I can't blame it on you, except for not trying to understand. I'll try once more. You can take it or leave it, Eddie. I've known this was coming; I know just what to say. Funny, isn't it?"

"Remember what I told you about the entity that is conceived of suspicion and born of guilt? It's a wicked little *poltergeist*—an almost solid embodiment of hate. And I'm a susceptible. Eddie, I can't be in the same room with any two people who bear suspicion and the corresponding sense of guilt! And the world is full of those people—you can't avoid them. Everyone has dozens upon dozens of petty hates and prejudices. Let me give you an example. Suppose you have a racial hatred of, say, Tibetans. You and I are sitting here, and a Tibetan walks in. Now, you know him. He has a

very fine mind, or he has done you a favor, or he is a friend of a good friend of yours. You talk for a half hour, politely, and everything's all right. In your heart, though, you're saying, 'I hate your yellow hide, your snivelling filth.' Everything will still be all right as long as he is unconscious of it. But once let this thought flicker into his mind—'He dislikes me because of my race'—and then and there the *poltergeist* is born. The room is full of it, charged with it. It has body and power of its own, completely independent of you or the Tibetan. I am a susceptible. The entity approaches me. I try to avoid it. I make bright remarks. I move around the room, busy myself with some flowers, a book, anything, but it's no use. I can't escape it. I can't fight it away or close my ego to it. Suddenly it has me, completely. I am part of it. It directs me, drives me. Its whole purpose is one of hate. It wants to drag your dislike and his suspicion into the light. I am its instrument now. My control is only strong enough to temper the words that burn at my lips. So instead of screaming out 'He hates you, because he hates all of your yellow kind!' I move closer to the man. I stop near him, and say out of the corner of my mouth, 'You'd better go soon. He doesn't like Tibetans and I don't know how long he can keep on being polite.' Once it's said, the *poltergeist* is nullified. The hatred between you is open, no longer secret, and secret hate is the very essence of a *poltergeist*. It dissipates, and I am free; but the damage is done. The most that I can do is to apologize, make a joke of it, say I was trying to be funny. I won't be believed, because my statement, rotten as it was, was true in its very essence and can't be denied. But if I should be believed in my apology, then the seeds of hatred

and suspicion are left, and the entity is conceived all over again, and possession takes place once more, then and there. To be spared that, I never deny what I have said, and never apologize for it. It would only make it worse.

"THAT'S how it happens, Eddie, and it can't be changed. I was always susceptible, and I made the condition permanent and acute by my experiments when I was alone in the mountains. I can't change, Eddie. I shouldn't have married you, shouldn't have done this to you. I—guess this is the wind-up. I'll get out." She tried a weak little laugh. "Good thing we haven't been married long enough to have collected a house and a mess of furniture, eh?"

"Yeh," I said. I watched her as she got up, slipped into a house-coat, and began to pack. She moved swiftly about the place, collecting the little odds and ends that I had just been learning to expect in my apartment. It had taken some learning, too. Bachelor digs sure get made over when a woman comes into them. After a while I went over and got into the bed. It was still a little warm and smelled nice. I turned my face to the wall, and in a minute I heard her thump a suitcase down beside the others in the middle of the room. She was looking at me; I could feel her eyes on the nape of my neck. I knew she was dressed for the street, all ready to go.

"Maria . . ."

"Yes, Eddie?" She answered a little too quickly to hide the fact that she wasn't as collected as she hoped.

"Wake me up around four, will you? We'll eat us some scrambled eggs and then take that spin around the park like we did when we were single."

There was a thump when she dropped her handbag, and then she was all

over me. I put my arms around her and held her until she gasped for breath, and then I grinned at her and got me some sleep.

After that I did my clubbing solo and let Maria build me a home. She loved it. If she missed not seeing people, she didn't complain. I guess she got used to it after a while; I know I did. Things went along beautifully until Ivor Jones, the station manager, called Jakie Feltner and me into his office one evening. Neither of us knew what was up, but we both had guesses.

Jones pursed his lips and took off his glasses as we came in. He was dried-up little man, a stickler for detail but a pretty good man to work for. He told us to sit, handed cigarettes around.

"Boys, I want you to help me. I don't have to tell you how the station is making out. I think we all are satisfied with it, but you know and I know that a small independent broadcasting station can't make as much or pay as much as a big network outlet. Now, one of the network stations here is shutting down. It needs complete new equipment, and the corporation wouldn't mind doing it. But since there are too many stations here already, and since we are equipped up to the hilt with all the latest, I rather think they'd like to take us over. They'd boost our power ten thousand watts. We'd run all their releases and therefore share in their income. You boys, as staff announcers, stand to get a twenty percent raise. How's it sound?"

"Swell," said Jakie. I nodded.

"I'm sold on it," said Jones. "If we could get Shanaman, the general manager of the Eastern Network, to feel the same way, we could come to terms. I've done all I could think of in a business way. But it'll take a lit-

tle more than that. If I can mellow the old boy down a bit with a swell dinner-party, I might get him to sign the papers then and there. I want you two to come and bring your women. It'll be next Friday night. Shanaman's bringing his wife. My house. You'll be there?"

"Formal?" asked Jakie. Jones nodded.

"I'd rather not, Mr. Jones," I said. "I sort of had an engagement—"

"Break it," Jones said. "Shanaman's interested in meeting you. As a matter of fact, your show is a high-spot, a real selling point for the station. You've got to come. And bring that new wife of yours. I want to meet her."

Jakie laughed and got up, slapping me on the back. "I'll persuade him, Mr. Jones. We'll be there, don't worry." He was a big fellow, that Feltner. He had me rushed out of there before I knew what went on. Cornering me in the corridor, he said, "Come on Eddie—be a sport. Don't queer that party. It means a lot to me. Claire—my wife—has been acting a little peculiar lately and that party ought to fix the trouble. No kidding, Eddie—you've got to do it."

"I'll see what Maria says," I muttered, and headed home.

MARIA said she didn't like the idea.

We had a long argument about it. I pointed out that it was formal, that it was a business affair, that the eight people who were there knew each other very little and had nothing but the broadest interests in common, and that anyway I couldn't avoid it. It was orders. I also mentioned the fact that Jakie wanted me to do it, and I was a good friend of his. Maria's arguments were all old stuff to me, but for one new one. She was afraid that she wouldn't be able to stand it. When

she had been in more or less constant contact with people, she was conditioned to the influx of possessions. Now it was different. She feared it. It was months since she had been through it; she was afraid of what it might do to her. But I had my way, and Friday night found us walking into Jones's place in Queens Village.

It was quite a layout. Jones had a nice income and used it. Big house, big rooms, big butler. We were the last to arrive. We got rid of our coats and were shown into the library, where cocktails were being served. I stopped at the door and looked around the room. Over in a corner Jones was talking to a stout old apple who seemed all jowls and boiled shirt. Shanaman, I surmised. Talking disinterestedly with Jones's slightly washed-out wife was Claire Feltner. I knew her well; she hung around the studio a lot. A nasty thought occurred to me; I'd noticed Claire there many a time when Jackie was out. Jones always seemed to be around at the time. I began to see why Jackie had been so anxious to bring Claire and Jones into the same room. He wanted to watch them. That was bad.

I rescued Jackie from the voluminous feminine counterpart of Shanaman. The network manager's wife had poor Feltner in a corner and was pounding his ear frighteningly with an account of her husband's metabolism.

Introductions were made all around, and I left Maria with Jackie while I joined Jones and Shanaman. The talk was general and too loud. Just about then I began to wish I hadn't come. That went on all the time I was there. I disliked particularly this business of our being in that big room, free to wander from person to person for Lord knows how long until dinner was served. In a matter of minutes Maria could

stumble across one of her little *poltergeists*, and then—well, in a matter of minutes Maria did.

SHANAMAN was building up to a terrific climax, in an unfunny story when I saw Maria, across the room from me, looking from Shanaman to Mrs. Jones and back again. There was something about her stance, her eyes, that told me she was fighting the thing. I broke away from Shanaman as fast as I could. Not fast enough. Maria got to Mrs. Jones before I did, sat down beside her, began talking swiftly. As I got there, Mrs. Jones rose, glaring at Shanaman, and went over to her husband.

"What goes on?" I asked anxiously.

"Oh, Eddie, it happened again." She would have cried if I hadn't caught her hands, squeezed them until they hurt. "Shanaman plans to put a network crew in your station if he takes it over. Everyone will lose his job, except you, Eddie!"

"And you told that to Mrs. Jones?"

"Yes—don't you see? She suspected it, and Shanaman knew he was going to do it! I couldn't help myself, Eddie!"

"That's all right, Kid," I whispered. "No hair off our necks." I watched the Joneses. It seemed to me that he didn't believe his wife. She was evidently furious with him for his stupidity and said so into his ear. He turned his back on her and went to Claire Feltner. She went over to see if she couldn't pump some information out of Shanaman. Jackie stood near them, glumly watching his wife puckering up to Jones.

"Try to keep away from Jackie," I said, turning back to Maria. But she had slipped away when I was looking at Jones. She was standing by the window behind me, kneading her hands and staring out into the night. I figured it

was best to leave her alone as long as she could stand it. Meanwhile, I was going to try to keep the rest of them away from her. I barged in on Shanaman's conversation with Mrs. Jones. It was short and sweet. She was just winding up what must have been quite a scintillating piece of vituperation.

"—and don't think I don't know what you're up to, you old wolf," she was saying. She was hopping mad. Shanaman looked bewilderingly indignant. It was too late to do anything about it.

"My dear lady," he said pompously, "I regret exceedingly that your suspicions should have reached such a state. Ah—Mr. Jones. Will you come here a minute?" Jones looked up, saw what was happening, came rabbiting over. I saw the studio deal flitting out the window when I saw Jones reach out and clip his wife across the mouth. Shanaman held up his hands in horror, then barged across the room to his wife.

Then everything happened at once. Maria popped up from nowhere, nudged Jackie Feltner, whispered in his ear, nodded toward Claire. Jackie roared, reached out, spun Jones around and smeared him with a terrific right hook. Shanaman, fear of publicity plastered all over his fat face, bolted for the door with his wife.

And that was the wind-up of Jones's precious little dinner party. Maria filled in the details for me on the way home. It seemed that Jones had been seeing a great deal of Jackie's wife, and wondered how far it had gone. Maria, possessed, told him, and he punched Jones's mouth. Mrs. Jones's hysterical calling of Shanaman's bluff sprang, I imagine, from jealousy and the desire to hurt Jones. It was an unholy mess, one of those awful things that are awful when they happen and funny afterward. Except for one thing. Jones didn't

get up after Jackie knocked him down. He smashed his silly brains out on the brass andiron in the fireplace.

THE rest of it was rough. When the trial was over and poor old Feltner got sent up for thirty years on a second-degree murder charge, there wasn't much left for me. Unfavorable publicity pulled a lot of advertising contracts, and anyway, as I said, there are too many radio stations in this town. But the notoriety hadn't finished with me when it took my living away from me. Eddie Gretchen turned out to be the guy with a thousand friends who never heard of him. The radio game was strictly on the receiving end, for me. Old Shanaman's bolting for the door the night of the murder hadn't done him a bit of good; he was subpoenaed and put on the grill with the rest of us. I hadn't liked the way he cried about it—after all, big shots and little, we were all in the same boat—and he got even with me by passing the word around the studios that I wasn't to get so much as an audition. That, after seven years in radio! Yeah, it was rough. I'd always had money and I didn't know how to go about being poor. I learned. Maria had a couple of grand in the cooler but that went quickly, along with what I'd saved, which wasn't a hell of a lot. I hit the jolly old rock-ribbed bottom the day I tried to get a job as a studio page and got well treated until somebody remembered me and I got handed the rush. The smell even reached into publishing houses, and the feature articles I used to sell brought checks every six months instead of every two weeks. I sold a little stuff under a phony name; but for that Maria and I would have starved. We lost our place and our furniture and the car. Bad. But I couldn't lose Maria. She almost left



me right after the trial, feeling herself guilty of Jones's murder. I talked her out of that, telling her that he had it coming to him anyway; and then she got morbid and turned on the gas one day! I got there in time, and the police emergency squad brought her around. After that she buckled down like the ace she was, and tried helping instead of hindering. God, when I think of her down on her four bones scrubbing floors, and rubbing her white hands raw on my shirts, I know what they mean when they say "For rich, for poorer" . . .

I stood out on the sidewalk in front of the radio playhouse and shivered because I had sold my overcoat six weeks before. There was nowhere else to turn to, and I hadn't the gall to go back to Maria so early in the day. Uptown, downtown, crosstown—all the same to me.

A man walked up, looked me over, handed me a slip of paper. It said, "Could you tell me how to get to South Ferry from here?"

I said, "Sure. Take the Seventh Avenue subway—"

He shook his head, pointed to an ear. Deaf. I took the pencil he offered, wrote down the directions. He tipped his hat, went his way. I remember wondering how a guy like that got such a nice warm coat. Some agency, I guessed. I got all my faculties and no overcoat. He's a deaf mute and has an overcoat. I'll take the overcoat.

Then the great idea hit me. I smacked my hands together, whooped like a drunken Indian, and headed at a dead run for the West Side, where Maria was trying to make a home for me out of an eleven-a-month cold water flat. I reached it, flung myself up three flights of stairs, fell gasping and moaning for breath inside the room. Maria didn't know what to make of it, and figured even less when I got wind

enough to explain. If she was possessed, I wanted to know, could she keep from tipping anybody off about it *if she wrote the information down?*

"I don't know, Eddie. I never tried it."

"Well, try it, damn it. Try it!"

"H-how?"

I glanced at the ninety-eight cent alarm clock on the stove. "Come on, babe. Get your coat on. We're going to get some money."

SHE was used to me by this time or she never would have done it. I didn't tell her until we reached the pawn-shop that the money was coming from the one thing of value she'd hung onto—the star sapphire I'd given her as an engagement ring the day before we got married. Under the three golden spheres I relieved her of it, shoved an old envelope and a stub of pencil into her hands, and dragged her in.

I knew the broker well by that time. The only Irishman I'd ever seen in a hockshop. "Terry, me lad," I shouted. "I'm about to do you a favor. Hock me this ring for eighty bucks and you can't lose a thing." I gave it to him. He grunted sourly. Maria started forward, about to speak. I shoved her toward a trunk, pointed at the paper and pencil. She grinned and began to write.

"I'll give ye ten," said Terence.

"And I'll take me pathronage ilsewhere," I mocked him.

"Twinty, an' ye're a young thief."

"Sivinty-foive, ye grave-robber."

"Twinty-two an' a half, and be dommed to ye. It's white gold, not platinum."

"Platinum's twenty bucks an ounce on the open market, you pernicious old Gael, and gold's thirty-five. Don't blind me with your jeweler's tricks."

And still not an interruption from

Maria.

Terence looked at the ring carefully through his glass.

"Thirty dollars."

"Will you make that thirty-two fifty?"

"I will that, and there I'm done."

"You're a good business man, Terence, and I'll treat you right. You just went up ten dollars and I can afford to come down ten. That's meeting you halfway at sixty-five dollars."

Maria's pencil scribbled busily.

"Fifty dollars to get yez out o' my store," said the broker with a great effort.

"Fifty-seven fifty."

We settled at fifty-five; I signed the book and we left. As soon as we were outside I snatched the envelope. Maria had written no less than twelve times. "Don't be a fool. He only paid sixty for it when it was new."

I kissed her then and there. "It works," I breathed. "It works!"

She looked at the envelope. "The truth will out," she grinned. "But Eddie—I didn't want to pawn that ring. I—"

"You dry up and leave it to me, pal," I said. "Come home—I want you to dig up that dress of yours—you know, the black-brown one with the truffles on it."

"Ruffles," she said. "You eat truffles. but it's an evening gown, Eddie. Where—"

"—are we going? West five-two street, babe, and we're going to scramble up all the dirt from gutter to gutter." I stopped in front of a "Tuxedos to Hire" joint. "I'm going in here. You beat it home and pretty up."

She did, under protest. I got myself a fair enough dinner jacket, and brought it home. In two hours we looked like a million. I tucked the thin little roll into my pocket, and we start-

ed. We took the subway to Fiftieth and caught a cab there to go to Fifty-second. A thirty-cent cab ride looks just as good as a three dollar one at the far end of the line. I carried a battery of sharp pencils and Maria had my little black book.

WELL, it was a snap. I'd barge into a table, and because I looked it and felt it, the old "friends" thought I was up on top again, and so they were glad to see me. Maria sat quietly with her book in front of her. I told everyone she was gathering material for a novel. Once in a while she would look sharply at a couple of faces and begin to scribble madly. For once in my life I let other people pick up the checks, and we worked practically the whole street. We got out of there with eighteen bucks left, which is something of a record, and I took the lady all the way home in a taxi. We spent the rest of the night poring through the book.

Man! What a haul! There was enough dirt there to resurface the Dust Bowl and ten like it. Advance information on big business deals; messings about with the Stock Exchange; who was seeing who, how long, why, and how much it cost; what book a major studio was going to buy; the truth about that fixed fight at the Garden Monday night. I found Maria an excellent editor. Once the little old *poltergeist* had dissipated, she was quite impersonal about what she found out. We took, out of more than two hundred juicy items, ten that were due to happen within the next twenty-four hours. They were carefully picked to do the least possible harm if they were made public, and they all packed a wallop. There was an act of sabotage, three elopements, a decision on the locale of the premier of a new picture, two business deals, a diplomatic stroke of genius, a

lapse of option on an erstwhile great movie star, and the name and address of a firm which was going to get a Government contract for high-pressure boilers on the battlewagons under construction at Boston Navy Yard. I wrote them up, wording them for the most punch, and first thing the next morning I took them up to the newspaper with the largest news-stand circulation in the country. I was in the office for forty minutes, and I walked out with fifty bucks advance. The following day I got a wire to come in and go to work. Every item had come as predicted. Score, one hundred percent.

So I'm back in the big time again.

Yes, I'm the guy they talk about. The one about whom they say, "Did you see his column today? Holy Swiss cheese, where does that man get all his information?" And "I'd like to know how a Broadway columnist gets that radio personality."

Well, I get the first from my wife, who sits quietly, writing in a little black book. She gets her dope from a thousand million little *poltergeisten*. And don't mention radio to me too often. The name of Eddie Gretchen still stinks on the stem, but I don't care. I don't use it any more. You ought to know who I am by this time.

THE END

## PROFESSOR HILPRECHT

### AND THE

### THIRTY-TWO HUNDRED YEAR OLD PHANTOM

By

SYLVAN MULDOON

**D**R. HERMAN V. HILPRECHT, Professor of Assyrian at the University of Pennsylvania, sat at his desk in concentrated thought, one evening in the middle of March, 1892. He was checking over the proof sheets of his forthcoming book. The Professor was wearying himself—as he had done so often in weeks preceding—in a vain attempt to decipher two small fragments of agate. The agate pieces were thought to have once been part of a finger ring belonging to some ancient Babylonian.

Professor Hilprecht's problem was greatly intensified by the fact that the fragments presented remnants only of characters and lines; that dozens of similar fragments had been found in the ruins of the temple of Bel at Nippur, with which nothing could be done; that in this case furthermore he had never had the originals before him, but only a hasty sketch made by one of the members of the expedition sent by the University of Pennsylvania to Babylonian.

After his weeks of intensive study Professor Hilprecht could conclude nothing more than that the fragments—taking into consideration the place in which they were found and the peculiar characteristics of the cuneiform characters preserved upon them, sprang from the Cassite period of

Babylonian history (circa 1700-1140 B.C.).

As the first character of the third line of the first fragment seemed to be KU, the Professor ascribed this fragment, with an interrogation point, to King Kurigalzu. He placed the other fragment as unclassified, with other Cassite fragments, upon a page of the printed proofs before him, where he had written about the unclassified fragments. The proof sheets lay there before him ready for the publisher.

Professor Hilprecht was still dissatisfied with what he had written and decided to go over the entire problem once more which availed him nothing, so he put his mark of approval under the last correction in the sheets, and about midnight, thoroughly exhausted, he went to bed, soon falling asleep, where he experienced a remarkable dream.

The phantasm of a tall, thin, priest of the old pre-Christian Nippur era appeared to him. The dream figure looked to be about forty years of age and was clad in a simple abba.

"Come with me," he motioned to the Professor.

He led Professor Hilprecht back in time and into a dream reconstruction of the temple of Bel and its treasure chamber. The Professor noticed that this treasure chamber was on the south-east

side. The phantasm took him into a small room with a very low ceiling and no windows in which there was a large wooden chest. Scraps of agate and lapis-lazuli lay scattered on the floor.

The ancient priest turned to him and said: "The two fragments which you have published separately on pages 22 and 26, belong together. They are *not* finger rings. Their history is as follows: King Kurigalzu (circa 1300 B. C.) once sent to the temple of Bel—among other articles of agate and lapis-lazuli—an inscribed votive cylinder of agate.

"Then we priests received a command from him to make a pair of earrings of agate for the statue of the god Ninib. We were in great dismay, since there was no agate as raw material at hand. In order to carry out the King's command there was nothing for us to do but cut the votive cylinder into three parts, thus making three rings, each of which contained a portion of the original inscription.

"The first two rings served as earrings for the statue of the god. The two fragments which have given you so much trouble are portions of them. If you will put the two together you will have the proof of my words to you. But the third ring you have not yet found during your evacuations—and you never will find it."

With those words the priest disappeared and Professor Hilprecht woke up immediately and told his wife of his experience. The next morning, Sunday, he examined the fragments once more in the light of the disclosures made to him by the dream priest.

"Look! Look!" shouted Professor Hilprecht to his wife. "Everything the priest told me in the dream is true!"

The original inscription on the votive cylinder read: *To the God Ninib, son of Bel, his Lord, has Kurigalzu, Pontifex of Bel, presented this.*

The problem had been solved! Solved by a phantasmal priest in a dream! In his work: *The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A, Cuneiform Texts, Vol 1., part 1, "Old Babylonian Inscriptions—Chiefly from Nippur,"* Professor Hilprecht stated in the Preface that he had unfortunately discovered too late that the two fragments belonged together, made the corresponding changes in the Table of Contents, pages 50 and 52, and it being not possible to transpose the fragments, as the plates were already made, he put in each plate a brief reference to the other.

Immediately after he had had his unique dream experience, Professor Hilprecht wrote it down in detail, just as I have told it here to you. He later showed the account, originally written in German, to his friend, Professor Newbold, also of the University of Pennsylvania and the two studied the matter in some detail, when suddenly

Professor Newbold said:

"Look here Hilprecht, here is a serious difficulty which is not explained. According to all our memoranda, and what we have here before us, the fragments are of different colors. It is not reasonable to assume that they originally belonged to the same object."

"Quite right," reflected Professor Hilprecht. "Right now the original fragments are in Constantinople. When I go there this summer I will have a chance to again see and examine them."

So there the matter stood until after Professor Hilprecht's next trip to the Orient, where he was sent by the Committee on the Babylonian Expedition to Constantinople, to catalogue and study the objects secured from Nippur and preserved there in the Imperial Museum.

It was to him a matter of the greatest interest to see for himself the objects, which, according to the ancient priest of his dream, belonged together, in order to satisfy himself that they had once been parts of the same votive cylinder. He told his dream to Halil Bey, the director of the museum and asked permission to see the objects.

The director became so interested in the story related by the Professor that he opened all the cases of the Babylonian section and requested him to search as he pleased. Father Scheil, an Assyriologist from Paris—who had examined and arranged the articles evacuated at the time the fragments were originally found, had not recognized the fact that those two particular fragments belonged together.

"I found one fragment in one case, and another in a case far away from it," relates Professor Hilprecht. "When I put them together the truth of my dream was demonstrated ad oculos. They had in fact once belonged to one and the same votive cylinder!"

"As it had been originally of finely veined agate, the stone-cutter's saw had accidentally divided the object in such a way that the whitish vein of the stone appeared only upon one fragment and the larger grey surface upon the other. Thus I was also able to explain Dr. Peters' discordant description of the two fragments!"

The ancient phantasmal priest had actually informed Professor Hilprecht in his dream that the fragments belonged together; that they were fragments of one and the same votive cylinder; that the cylinder was presented by King Kurigalzu to make a pair of earrings, and not finger rings; that they were dedicated to the god Ninib; that the treasure chamber was located on the southeast side of the Temple of Bel, at Nippur, in ancient Babylon! And that he, the priest, had been one of the makers of the earrings, a mortal being who had lived thirty-two centuries ago! (From the forthcoming book *PHYSICAL EXPERIENCES OF FAMOUS PEOPLE*, by Sylvan Muldoon.)

Coming! "HIDDEN CITY" by Chester S. Geier

# ★ PEARLS IN PILLS ★

By JEFFRY STEVENS

**N**OWHERE in the history of mankind has ignorance and superstition manifested itself to such a universal degree as in the science of medical treatment, especially where drugs are concerned. Almost every known substance under the sun has been attributed at one time or another with the power of bringing about some miraculous body cure, and the list is one that will bring amazement and amusement to modern men. The fact that a substance was new, unusual, or difficult to obtain seemed to exaggerate its possible importance as a medicine, and by one means or another it was forced into the human system. Even the common potato, when first introduced into Europe and judged as a novelty, was used as an ingredient in what was then known as a love potion. Gold dissolved in acid, referred to as "potable gold" was once a cure-all. Thousands of substances ranging from powdered Egyptian mummy to ground pearls were supposed to bring the stricken medieval aristocrats back to health, but of course they never did.

Powdered Egyptian mummy, a popular ingredient of medieval and Renaissance prescriptions for those people who could afford to purchase it, resembled rosin and had no more physiological effect than rosin. Unicorn's horn, which was another highly prized remedy of that period, was supposedly derived from the mythical unicorn, but was in reality ordinary ivory. It was said to possess the power of destroying poison mixed with food—a valuable dietary precaution for kings and other nobles. It was the custom to dip the piece of horn in the king's cup before he drank.

Anything with gruesome associations seemed to end up as a medicine. Usnea, a moss scraped from the skull of a criminal who had been hung in chains, was an official drug in the pharmacopeia until the nineteenth century; it was carried by all the apothecary shops, and the first edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica devoted a section to its curative properties. The rope which was the property of the hangman was supposed to cure sores and aching joints. After a hanging the executioner would cut it into as many pieces as possible and auction them off to the highest bidders to be used in stroking the skin of the sore area. Other peculiar substances formerly used as drugs include crushed sow bugs and body lice as well as incinerated toads. Even old shoes were ground up and taken internally for dysentery.

A highly unusual type of treatment came into use during the eighteenth century known as sympathetic treatment, and doubtlessly had its value. An ointment or powder composed of human blood, eunuch's fat, and moss scraped from a criminal's skull, would be applied to the weapon which had inflicted the wound—not the injured part. In-

stead, the victim's limb was washed and bandaged and left alone to heal while the weapon received the dubious benefit of the ointment.

A clear idea of the nature and number of the substances used in the medicinal treatment of by-gone days, and also of the tactics enterprising physicians were in the habit of employing can best be gained from the records of the case of King Charles II at the time of his death. The year was 1685 and the patient received the best care available in those days. Everything the men of medicine knew was brought into play, but in vain. Thirteen or fourteen physicians had been called in to treat the king when he had a sudden very violent convulsion. Seventeenth-century autopsy records are far from complete, but modern doctors glancing at the account have ventured to guess that the king suffered with a floating blood clot which had plugged up an artery and deprived some portion of his brain of the proper blood supply.

The room full of doctors began by bleeding the ailing monarch from a vein in his right arm. Next his shoulder was cut into and the incised area "cupped" to yield eight ounces more of blood. An emetic and purgative were administered, followed by doses of antimony, sacred bitters, rock salt, mallow leaves, violets, beet root, comomile flowers, fennel seed, linseed, cinnamon, cardamom seed, saffron, cochineal, and aloes, in various combinations and forms. The king's head was shaved and a blister raised on his scalp. A sneezing powder of hellebore root was administered, and also a powder of cowslip flowers to "strengthen his brain." The cathartics were repeated at frequent intervals and interspersed with a soothing drink of barley water, licorice and sweet almond. Among the other substances administered were white wine, absinthe, and anise, melon seeds, manna, slippery elm, black cherry water, an extract of flowers of lime, lily-of-the-valley, lavender, and dissolved pearls. The list of supposed medicines ran on and on, and apparently the king's tortures continued in their ministrations until the very end when his pain-racked body gave up the struggle. A summing up of the entire case would lead one to believe that the poor man of that time was better off than the King. Unable to afford medical attention, he was able at least to die in peace!

Luckily for later mankind, the scientific method of controlled tests came into use during the nineteenth century. The curative value of drugs was proven, and the useless concoctions were discarded. The standards of medical education were raised to a safe level and from that time on there was no danger of receiving such picturesque items as ground pearls in a dose of medicine.





The knife flew through the air—found its mark

# LAND of the DAMNED

by BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

**It happened one August night in 1970.**

**A shower of what at first seemed to be the**

**Perseid meteors—but they weren't meteors!**

**A**UGUST 21, 1970!  
Dale Norton would not, *could not*, forget that date. It was engraved on his brain in letters of flame.

The tassled corn hung heavy. The dry grass rustled softly under his feet. There was the familiar, yet always strange odor of rich earth and that which came from the earth: the corn and wheat and all the ripe fruition of Nature's boundless goodness. And Dale Norton was glad to be alive and part of it all.

Blaze, Dale's dog and boon companion moved on silent, padded feet beside him, turning his shaggy head now and then in worshipful glance at his master. The sky was heavy with stars. Dale had never seen a more beautiful night. He saw through the corner of his eye a falling pin-point of light explode in momentary brilliance, then die.

"Guess summer's about over, pooch," he said softly. "Look!" He pointed to the heavens. Blaze's tail wagged furiously and he bounded back and forth, as though he thought his master had given him command to play. But Norton's eyes were riveted on the heavens. The Perseids, those meteorites whose visit to our atmosphere were an unfailing August occurrence, were out in force. Norton could not remember when

he had seen so many of them.

Yet on this night there was something strange about them. For a moment he could not think what it was. Then it came to him. They were not all meteors! For some of them did not explode in flaming incandescence. There were those who passed overhead with a speed beyond human comprehension. He could not take his eyes from the spectacular display. More and more of the strange phenomena passed above him.

Norton didn't remember at what precise moment panic took him in its grip. The transition between peace and fear was an instant of which he had no cognizance. He only knew that his clothes had become too tight. That his throat had become parched. He tore his clothes from his body with frantic fingers, ripping away buttons and tearing at the restraining cloth: until he was completely nude!

He panted and gasped as if each breath he took was his last. A sudden sound made him whirl about. Blaze had appeared from between a stand of corn and was regarding him with cocked ear. The dog whined in fear. And Norton echoed the sound. Only in the man's voice there was something horrible beyond words. Blaze's head sunk down and the hackles rose along the furry back. Slowly, he began to

retreat.

Norton crouched low. His mouth opened and sounds—they could not be words, there was nothing human in them—reached out to stop the dog. It stopped. The man advanced in a slow shambling trot toward it. The dog's head lifted in a sort of puzzled movement, as if it were not quite certain of itself.

Then, before it could move, Norton leaped on it!

Blaze whirled even as a grasping hand slid along the fur. Almost it was clear of the clutching fingers. Then they found a grip on a hind leg. And Blaze howled once in pain and fear. For the man had twisted savagely at the leg until there was a sound as of breaking wood.

The dog's head swept downward and sideways in a swift movement that was sheer reflex. Its teeth slashed at the naked, hairy forearm lying on its flank. Blood streamed in a crimson tide where the teeth ripped into the flesh. Then the man's hands came up to meet in a vise around the furry throat of the dog. There was an instant of whirling movement when the man and dog were as one. Then Norton flung the dog to the ground. His foot came down in a terrible, stomping crash on the small of the dog's back at its hind quarters. His right arm pulled the dog's head back—and Dale Norton sank his teeth in the dog's throat and ripped savagely until the flesh tore and his mouth became filled with the hot salty blood!

THE man, it was no longer a man, but rather some strange sort of brute-being, lifted his head from the grotesque body of the dog. The head swayed back and forth in odd movement that was like a person in sorrow. The head stopped its shaking. The man arose until it stood almost erect,

but not quite, as though the crouch it was in was as far as it could get to the perpendicular. Turning, it began an ape-like shambling toward the small cluster of buildings at the far edge of the first orderly row of corn. Blood stained the face into a red mask out of which his eyes gleamed in warm, animal pleasure.

He didn't seem to notice the gravel of the path. If he did, he paid no attention to the fact that the coarse bits of rock tore at the tender flesh of his soles. The path wound past the steel-ribbed fence of the big pen. Grunting animal sounds took his attention. He paused for an instant, then moved across the grass to investigate. The fence gleamed in an oddly broken pattern in the moonlight, as if it were stained on some parts of its usual gleaming surface.

He stumbled over an obstruction. Stopping, he bent to see what it was. It proved to be a short, double-bitted axe, imbedded in a cord of wood. He pulled it free and continued his advance to the pen. His nostrils dilated and his mouth loosened in a grin as he smelled the familiar odor, sweet and warm, of blood. He became aware too, of a strange chomping sound. Then there was silence. He peered down from over the top rail of the fence. The coarse grin broadened and a trickle of saliva made its way down the cleft chin. A chuckling sound, half of pleasure and half of anticipation came from his throat. His fingers fumbled at the latch; then it opened wide and he stepped within.

The brood sow regarded him with a quiet look. Scattered around the pen were the mutilated figures of a half dozen piglets. On the ground, below the ugly snout was the body of another, its belly ripped open by her tusks. Her snout dripped blood. The



man looked only once at the dead animals. His interest was only in the living. For they too had to die!

For in that delicate instrument of flesh and bone which only a short time before had been that which made him different from the animal world, had only a single thought. To kill! To kill whatever living thing came into its path!

The two moved simultaneously in each other's direction. Nor did either give warning. But the man was much the faster. The blade of the axe described a flashing half-circle of light before it found haven in the sow's skull. The man looked down at the body and once more there was the sound of mad laughter. Then, without another look at either the animal or the axe, he turned and walked from the pen.

**N**EITHER beast nor man nor machine moved on the broad, four-lane highway. Only the shambling figure of Dale Norton moved on the concrete. The moon beat down in pale indifference to the scene. Nor was it any more indifferent than the man. He passed an overturned car. He peered into its interior with an incurious glance. The driver, his head bent at an impossible angle was lying half in the seat and half on the floor. He was dead. Norton moved around the front of the car to the other side. Two people, a man and a woman, were locked in an embrace on the ground. They too were dead. But their's was a death more horrible than the driver's. For his had been one of accident.

The two on the ground had fought each other to the death. Neither had any clothes on. The woman had a broken neck. Clenched in her teeth was the man's ear. She had bitten it off in her death struggle. Her fingers were around his throat as were his

around hers. Norton nudged the bodies with his toe. They moved stiffly, then rolled back into the same position of frozen immobility. He went back on the highway.

A dozen times he came across similar scenes. Always, they were dead. And always they had found it necessary to remove their clothes. The positions were different. That was all.

He walked along, the only living thing to be seen on the whole plane of that land. A human robot, moving in patternless, purposeless motion. The moon sank below the horizon. And still the figure of Dale Norton strode on. A grey murk rose up out of the east. Mist came from the edge of the meadow, flanking the broad highway. The greyness lighted into a pale effulgence of rosy color. The rim of the sun appeared from the edge of the earth. Higher and higher it rose until its rays struck full into his eyes. And a terrible transformation took place in the man.

His mouth opened and bestial, inhuman, tortured sounds came from the twisted, grimacing lips. His hands lifted and tore at his head with clawing fingers, tore until the black hair that covered his scalp did so only in patches. A last, horror-filled shriek rasped from his throat. And he fell to the ground. His body twitched in epileptic-like paroxysms, then was stilled.

**D**ALE NORTON turned and rolled to his side. He groaned with the effort it took. Every muscle in his body ached as though he had been beaten. He arose and looked down at his naked body. Shame swept over him at the sight. It was a shame born out of nothingness, for he was incapable of thought. As it had come, so did it leave him, instantly, nor did he wonder at the feeling.

The sun was overhead. And he felt hunger. He moved his head from side to side, his eyes peering keenly into the underbrush for sight of anything that moved. He grunted in disappointment for he saw that nothing disturbed the rank grass. He rubbed a hand across a stubbled cheek. The hair rasped strongly. It puzzled him, for instinct still played a role in his life and he never permitted the hair to grow for more than a day. That, too, like his feeling of shame passed quickly.

He stepped back on the highway. Something told him to move in the direction of the sun's rising. Time after time, he passed the rusted wrecks of machines strange to his eyes. Their once sleek bodies, chromium-plated, were now rusted and mis-shapen. He gave them no more than a cursory glance.

The sun sank below the horizon. The moon arose. And now he came to the reaches of a large city. There was no light illuminating the small homes of the suburb through which he passed. Nor was there any human being to be seen on the wide, paved streets. It was a town, dead for all practical purposes. He did not think it strange that such a thing could be.

He passed a trolley, that like the homes he had seen, was without light. It stood motionless upon the street. A voice, hoarse, emotionless, yet which held implications of terror, suddenly called to him:

"Hist!"

He paused.

Once again the voice called:

"Hey there!"

He turned and peered at the trolley. Then he saw it. First he saw the head. Then he saw the rest of the body within the street car. An arm came through the broken glass of one of the windows and motioned him forward. He came

forward on wary, tip-toeing feet.

Norton peered up at the face at the window. It was a thin, emaciated face. Hunger and terror had given it lines nature had not intended it to have. A wispy beard covered the face from the cheekbones to the chin.

"Quick, friend," the voice said. "In here! Before the guard makes its rounds."

The words meant nothing to Norton. Guards? Rounds? From around the corner of a bisecting street there came the sounds of marching feet. Once again the voice urged, "quickly!" This time Norton didn't hesitate. Before the vanguard of the watch came around the corner, he was through one of the open windows and crouching on the floor beside the stranger. His body bulked large against the tiny one of the man within the car. Words came from the little man, as he peered from the window, nor did he turn to look at Norton once he was in the safety of the trolley!

"Are you mad, that you walk about naked, in the hours between dark and dawn? Life means little these days, true enough. But at least you are free. If one of them catches you. . . ."

He ducked his head down suddenly, in the midst of warnings, and came face to face with Norton, for the first time. The moon, slanting down through the windows shone full upon his face.

The bearded face stared at him as if he was seeing a ghost.

"You! You!" the voice rasped hoarsely. "Dale! Dale Norton! Oh no! Not to you!"

NORTON, hunkered down on his heels, gave the other a glance of bewilderment. The other went on in a low voice, as if to himself:

"And why not Dale Norton? Is he



so different from the rest? Only mentally. And first—"he left off and peered closely into the other's countenance. There was fear in the old man's eyes, then. After a moment he sighed deeply. "No. No, the kill mood is gone. If I only knew how long . . ." again there was the reflective stop. "H'm. His beard is long," he resumed in his monologue. "But that can mean little. And it can mean a lot. If only I could break through to his . . ." he stopped again, this time to listen. For Norton had broken his silence. From the other's sub-conscious, a small wave had broken through:

"Beard—too—long. Shave every—day. Norton Norton. I'm Norton."

Excitement sent the little man's voice into a squeak:

"You're coming through, man. Think hard! Who are you?"

Silence.

Then the monotone, "Norton. I'm Norton. I'm Norton!" The last had been a hoarse acknowledgment of a fact that was understood. The spell he was in was broken. And with the return of Norton's mental faculties, there came recognition of the little man.

"Witson!" Norton exclaimed. "Jarvis Witson. What are . . ." he became aware then, of his condition. "Holy cats! Someone took my clothes!" he muttered.

"Shh!" Witson hissed sharply. He had been on the alert ever since he had first heard the approach of the patrol. Norton heard the sound of pounding feet also. A voice, hoarse, strident, shouted:

"Rota! The trolley! Numbers, 3, 7, 4, 8, follow me."

"Quick!" Witson called a low warning. "Down! As low as you can."

Norton hunkered down on his haunches as far as he was able. There was an urgency in Witson's voice that

didn't permit questioning, then. Booted feet sounded in rising crescendo. They came up the steps of the trolley. The two men, crouched behind the bulwark of the seat heard the guard come to a halt as he stepped within the motorman's cab. Then a narrow beam of light came to life and swept down the narrow aisle.

The darkness was intense when the beam snapped off. And then the guard, satisfied that no one was hiding in the trolley, trotted down the stairs.

Witson's eyes gleamed in satisfaction. They had outwitted the guard. And Norton's calf muscles cramped into a tight knot. He shifted his weight, leaning against the seat as he did so. It gave suddenly, rolling back on squeaking rollers. The squealing sound was as the knell of doom. For the guard came to a halt. And his voice rose in warning, as he ran back to the trolley:

"Guards! Mio! This way!"

"Run for it!" Witson commanded.

In an instant he was out the window, Norton close behind him. They sped across the street. While behind them, the guards came swiftly around the sides of the trolley. A half dozen fingers of light moved to pick them up. One struck the figures and whining, whiplash-sounds screamed toward them. Norton sped past a tree and something struck it as his body was shielded, momentarily by its trunk. There was a burst of flame, an explosive crack, and the tree slowly toppled to the ground. Fear lent wings to the feet of the two refugees.

They ran down a passageway between two homes. The concrete of the path continued to a gate, set in a stone wall. The gate was open. Norton in the lead, came to an abrupt halt. It was an impasse. Before them was a screen fence. And beyond it he

saw the moonlight reflecting on water. There was no place for them to go. To either side was open ground. Already, he heard the running sound of the guards. Without an instant's hesitation, he ran to the fence and scaled it, hanging by his fingers for a second, gauging the distance to the water. He dropped nor was there the smallest splash when he struck. Witson followed immediately. He was not as good a diver as Norton. There was more than a perceptible splash when he lit.

NORTON swam at an angle for the far bank. Behind him, a few feet, he heard Witson. Once again the lights came into play. And suddenly the water boiled in a puff of smoke, just past his head.

"Swim under water," he called to Witson. "That tree upstream—safe under it."

Norton scrambled up the bank, turned and dragged Witson after him. The little man was visibly tired. But there was no time to rest. Norton recognized their haven. It was a forest preserve. He remembered the river they had swum, also. It meandered in zig-zag fashion through the preserve for its entire length. And somewhere, nearby he hoped, there should be a narrow, wooden span which crossed it.

"Wait here," he whispered.

Without a further word, he went flat on his belly and squirmed forward until he lay on the edge of the bank, only a little ways past the tree. The marsh grass hid him well. Lifting his head, he peered up and down the river's length. A grin appeared on his face. The bridge lay a hundred yards upstream.

He crawled back to Witson.

"Follow me," he said. And set off at

a trot. Witson panted after him. They ran for perhaps three minutes. The older man noticed that they were on a well-defined path. The path led past a small, railed enclosure. Wire cages were set behind the bars. Witson could not see whether there was anything alive in the cages. There was no sound from them. The path led in a circle around the small animal zoo. At the far end was a house or rather a log cabin. Norton made straight for it.

There were two dead people in it, a man and a woman.

Norton's face was twisted in grief, as he knelt at their side. They lay in a close embrace, as though death had caught them in the midst of a kiss. Neither had a stitch of clothes on. And Norton's horror-stricken eyes saw that it was not love which held them so close, but hate. For they had died, tearing at each other's throats—with their teeth. The man's lips were glued to the woman's throat at the point where the jugular vein had once pulsed in living. Her face had only rested against his. So it seemed to Norton, until he looked closer. Then he saw that she had already accomplished her purpose. The man's throat had been ripped wide open.

Norton straightened and staggered over to the doorway and was violently sick for a moment. He felt a hand on his shoulder and a gentle voice ask:

"Friends?"

"Ye-s," he mumbled. Then louder, "what horrible thing has happened? I—I seem to remember other—horrors like these."

Witson pulled him back into the cabin. He made Norton sit while he roamed the narrow confines of the small cabin. There wasn't much to be seen. Simply furnished, it held little of luxury, except a fine radio set. Witson

sighed audibly as he went to the set and fiddled with the dials. He did it haphazardly, as if he was only wasting time until the man sitting at the deal table would regain his composure. Witson started as the light glowed bright, then faded but did not go out. Almost feverishly, Witson manipulated the dials. A humming sound was heard.

The man at the table lifted his head from his arms and looked dazedly about him when the sound of a strange human voice came into the oppressive air of the cabin.

The voice said:

"B. B. C. calling New York! B. B. C. calling New York!" There was a second's silence, then the voice came on again, "Come in New York." Another pause, then the announcer's voice once again, this time it held overtones of fright, "what is wrong over there? Why don't you answer? What is . . . ?"

Witson snapped the set off with a muttered imprecation, "damn them! Our last hope—gone!"

The man at the table shook his head. When he spoke there was a brittle quality to his voice that was obviously foreign to it for Witson jerked around at the sound and looked keenly into Norton's face as if he feared that the other's mind had given way under the blows it had taken. But a single glance at the squared jaw and narrowed eyes told him otherwise.

Norton said:

"What is the date?"

Witson looked his surprise.

"Date?" he asked hesitantly. "Why—why, I think it's the fifth—yes, the fifth of September."

NORTON'S eyes widened. Two weeks had passed, two weeks that were taken from him and of which he had no memory. He looked at the bodies of his friends and turned quickly

away. Perhaps he was better off that it was so? He came right to the point, then:

"What happened on August twenty-first?"

Witson closed his eyes and recited in voice, slow and heavy with hidden passion, the events which had come to pass since that day:

"The United States were invaded by a people from outer space. Yes, from a universe far beyond the confines of any we know. And in a single day they accomplished that which we thought would be the impossible. They conquered us!"

"No!" Norton burst out.

Witson thrust out a frail, blue-veined hand to halt the other's pent up words.

"Yes!" he continued. "They did. With machines and weapons beyond any of our devising. First, and I must confess that how, is a mystery to me; they spread through these machines an over-powering compunction to every human mind within their reach the desire to kill. I don't know how many millions were killed in the first night. I am afraid to guess.

"They came in immense space ships. Hundreds of ships containing thousands of men in each ship. That night, every radio set in the country went out. Every means of communication went dead. We were completely isolated from the rest of the world. And that reminds me. The radio in this cabin was on. I wonder. . . ." He moved to the wall and snapped at the light switch. Nothing happened. "H'm. Now that's odd," he said in a low tone. "Radio goes on, yet there's no light."

A ghost-smile flickered on Norton's lips. He remembered that little oddity of Witson's. The ruminative, whispered speculations he held with himself. It somehow brought an air of reality to the whole fantastic and terrible situa-

tion. Norton explained the phenomena:

"Nothing very mysterious in that, Jarvis. The set doesn't need any electrical current to operate."

Witson's right eyebrow raised. It gave him an odd pensive look. "And how do you know that, my friend?" he asked.

"I built that set. A couple of months back," Norton replied.

"I see. Another one of your experiments, I presume?"

"Right. Electronics. But too complicated to explain. At least right now. The important thing, to get back to it, is what do we do now?"

Witson looked oddly pleased.

"Right to the point, eh Norton? I've always admired you for that faculty, as you remember. It was the reason why I told you to go in for research, when you were taking my course in anthropology. The dust of the ages was not meant for you. Yet the dust has come to settle on the present."

"Elaborate."

Witson looked to the outside before he went on. The familiar pattern of a new day's birth was beginning to unfold. He brought his glance back to Norton.

"Those space ships bore the symbol of the four forces! Mu and Lemuria! Perhaps Atlantis also. Those fabled lands *did* exist!"

Suddenly Norton had a vivid memory of a bygone day. A half dozen undergraduates lounging about the bachelor apartment of Jarvis Witson, head of the Archeology department of the university. And Witson expounding his theories. He even remembered some of the conversation, "*There are as many reasons to believe that the civilizations of Mu and Atlantis did not perish, as there are to the affirmative,*" Witson had said. "*After all, it is all in the ap-*

*proach. I like to think that I am open minded. Research has brought many things to light about these lands. And the scientist has not answered any of the questions involved. Instead, many of them, in particular those whose names are considered the great, passed off the discoveries as either not genuine or too minute in themselves to present a worthwhile problem for investigation."*

THERE had been some further talk about books, and about references which could be found to substantiate Witson's theory, even in the Bible. Then it had broken up.

"Still riding that horse, Witson?" Norton asked.

Anger flamed in the frail man's eyes. Words blazed from his lips:

"Horse! I know! I heard them talk of it. The one they call, Jetto. I even know why they are here."

Norton's chin dropped. Then his eyes narrowed. Had Witson lost his senses? No! The old man was angry, yes, but a sane anger, directed at the disbelief shown his words.

"Sorry," Norton apologized. He became aware that day was breaking. And the problem of what they were going to do was still unanswered.

"Look," he said. "The sun'll be up in a few minutes. And I imagine that the patrol which chased us has reported that we are somewhere in the vicinity. We'll be sitting ducks here. Do you know of any place where we will be safe, for a while?"

Witson nodded that he did. But when Norton started for the door, he stopped him.

"Can't go out like that," he said. "Got to get some clothes—h'm. Should be some here."

Norton gulped. Fred Antolini and his wife had been very dear friends of

his. The thought of wearing some of the dead man's apparel gave him a sick feeling. Swinging about, Norton made for the clothes closet and after rummaging around came out with a pair of slacks and a heavy, flannel shirt. They fit him fairly well. He was even luckier with the shoes and socks. They fit perfectly.

Witson stopped on the threshold. He turned to Norton and said, apologetically:

"I—I hope you know how to get out of this?"

"You mean the forest preserve?"

"Yes. Once I have oriented myself, then—"

Norton laughed heartily. It did him good. Somehow the laugh helped to dispel some of the gloom.

"Just tell me where you want to go," he suggested. "I'll get us there."

"Well, you know that little college near the village of Rook Park? I've been hiding out in the basement of the school."

Norton took the lead. He struck straight for the forested center of the park. Fifteen minutes of walking and they had reached the outskirts of the preserve. Norton proceeded with a greater caution, then. The trees were cut off sharply at the edge of one of the streets. He did not want to come into the open before he made sure that there was no one around. They lay on the ground behind the protecting foliage of a large bush. The street was deserted.

He peered between the close-pressed branches and saw the pointed spire of the school chapel. It wasn't far off. But there was the whole of a city block to traverse before they reached it. Once more he surveyed the situation. There was little choice. They were at the farthest edge of the preserve. They had to come out into the open!

SLOWLY, the two men walked down the deserted street. They looked neither to the right nor left. There was something odd to their walk. As if they were walking tip-toe, expectant of disaster. Then the chapel was before them.

Witson scurried in between the boundary walls of the chapel and the adjoining building. Norton followed.

Their goal proved to be a narrow, squat building.

Witson turned a face that was an odd mixture of weariness and elation in Norton's direction.

"This is it," he said, turning the knob and entering.

"Aye," said a strange voice. "This is it!"

A strangled sound came from Witson's lips.

"Mio!" he gasped.

The man facing them smiled. His lips made a deep V in his face. Norton found time to notice that the V motif was carried out throughout; in the shape of the ears and the way the hair lay. Then Mio spoke again:

"Did you think us fools? We knew all along that you were using this place for a hide-away. So that when you got away from the patrol last night we simply waited here for your return."

Norton didn't have to turn to know that there were men behind them. He heard movement of shod feet on the tile floor. He turned his head casually and saw ten men standing about in watchful attitudes. The door was still open, just as when they had stepped inside. He gave their captors a curious look. It was obvious that they came from a land or place beyond his knowledge.

They were all dressed alike, in close fitting jackets of some metallic substance. Covering their limbs were skin-tight doublets, the ends of which were tucked into ankle-length boots. Facial-



ly; they all looked alike. He noted the absence of interest they showed and thought it odd.

Mio gave an order:

"Truss them up!"

Norton would have attempted to fight. But he saw that several of the men had taken a pistol-like weapon from a holster on their belt. The memory of what had happened to the tree when the charge it contained struck it, still stuck. He remained lax as they bound his arms.

They walked through one of the two halls and out a door leading to a side street. Drawn up at the curb was a strange vehicle. Slim, cigar-shaped, it was about thirty feet long and perhaps ten feet thick.

There were no wheels on the vehicle. A door, set flush into the curved wall, opened and they stepped within. No sooner were they seated than the car started. Norton's eyebrows lifted when he noticed the complete absence of motion. He turned to remark on it to Witson, and Mio said:

"Outside!"

Norton went, "huh?" And one of the guards nudged him heavily. There was no mistaking the implied command. Norton stepped out. They were in front of the city hall.

All seemed confusion. There was a constant parade of armed men coming in and out of the building. The two men were quickly herded through the swinging doors and into an elevator, manned by one of the now familiar outsiders. In the hurried glimpse Norton had of the street, he noticed the fewness of people.

The elevator stopped at the fourth floor and they marched in quick step to an office at the end of the hall. Two men stood to either side of the glass-fronted door. One of them swung the door wide and Norton and Witson

followed Mio and two of the others into the office.

A man sat at a wide desk. He was the only one in the room.

Mio bowed his head in a sharp nod and said:

"These are the two the guards saw last night."

"Good!" said the man at the desk. "All right you two, step forward."

Norton looked down at the man. He could feel Witson's body tremble as it pressed against his. The man behind the desk said nothing. He looked very much like Mio. And Norton saw then, that there was more than a similarity of looks. There was a cruelty to the set of their lips and to the high arch of their eyelids, a cruelty which needed the smallest of excuses only to come into the open. The two looked at each other with the same degree of intensity. Then the man behind the desk said:

"How was it you escaped our patrols on the first night?"

Norton snorted aloud.

"Perhaps because they were too stupid to find me?" he suggested ironically.

THE other's eyelids crinkled in a smile. And Norton went to his knees as one of the guards struck him from behind. Blood trickled from his nostrils. He shook his head, clearing it from the cobwebs of shock and rose to his feet. The smile had reached the other's lips.

"Aren't you going to suggest that I remove your bonds? It seems to be a common complaint among your countrymen that we are bullies and cowards," he said.

Norton smiled a crooked smile. The blood dribbled down and past the corner of his mouth. Passion had boiled in his breast for the barest second, after the blow, but now he was filled with a

cold curiosity about these people. Anger and the consequences of it would avail him nothing, he realized.

"I'm afraid you have the wrong man for that," he answered mildly. "Stupidity is not one of my vices."

"Very well put," the other said. "Perhaps we can use you—in a capacity more fitted to your intelligence."

"Perhaps? Would you permit me a small allowance of curiosity?"

"Yes?"

"Why have we been brought here? What is your purpose?"

Norton didn't expect an answer. The other did, however.

"To use you as a laborer. The hidden city will be found and when we have, there must be several hundred thousand of you people put to work. Simple, isn't it?"

"As far as I'm concerned, yes. But why the old man?"

"He was agile enough to lead us a merry chase. Then he's capable of doing labor."

"Since when do the men of Mu use men of science as slaves?" Witson asked unexpectedly.

The man behind the desk stiffened in surprise. His mouth opened loosely then closed in a thin lipped vise.

"What do you know of Mu, old fool?" he snapped out sharply.

"As much . . ." Norton began to explain when the other broke in:

"Be still! Let the old one answer Ribal."

"I know that it still lives," Witson answered.

There was an interval of silence. Then Ribal arose and said:

"Perhaps it were best that Jetto sees the both of you? Follow me."

Ribal waved the two guards and Mio from the room and opened a door which led to an inner office. They followed him as he went through the room be-

yond the door and then into a long corridor. At the end of the corridor was another door, this one of plain wood. It was unguarded. Ribal opened it and motioned for the two to go in.

It proved to be just another office. But there were no desks in this one. A long, low couch ran the width of the room. Behind it, Norton caught a glimpse of the building fronting La Salle Street. Drapes made a clear view impossible. There were a half dozen men in the room. They were clustered about the couch and the man sitting on it.

Heads turned at the sound of the door opening. As Ribal and his prisoners advanced, the men parted in front of the man on the couch to give Norton a full view of the important personage.

**H** HE SAW a man of average build.

A narrow, triangular beard, started an inch below his lower lip, gave to the man an appearance of intellectuality, a look bore out by the high, though narrow forehead. He was dressed as the rest. There seemed to be no variation to the Murian's manner of dress. There was something about this man, though, that was a little different from the rest. Some inner spirit that showed through the flesh. It showed in his eyes and the cool regard in which he looked them over.

"The reason for this interruption had better be one of importance," he said in a voice that was like a twanging steel wire.

The rest of the Murians listened and looked with cold indifference at the two prisoners.

"Aye, mighty Jetto! Ribal would not disturb the conference, if he didn't. . . ."

"All right, man. Get on with it."

"These two have claim to being men of science."

Norton didn't remember claiming any such distinction for himself. But he let it ride.

The man on the couch looked the two before him up and down. It was a gesture devoid of interest.

"H'm," Jetto murmured in sudden appraisal. "Men of science, eh? Perhaps we can use them, Fu-ta, not that I have changed my mind from its original thought, but from sheer expediency," Jetto threw the words to one of the men standing close to his side.

The one called, Fu-ta, said, "The Prime Number man in the city they call, New York, has already sent word that the people there are forming groups of revolt."

Jetto's dark brows drew together in sudden anger.

"Damn them, then!" he keened in a high, passionate voice. "If they interfere, I'll give them more than just a taste of madness. And this time it will not be accidental!"

"Jetto! I beg of you! We simply don't have the men with which to war on them. Any delay can be costly!"

Jetto's breath whistled from his nostrils in a high, thin sound.

"Very well," he muttered harshly. "You two! Do you carry any weight with your people? Will they listen to you?"

Witson answered for them:

"About myself, I can say that I am not well known in any field other than anthropology. But Dale Norton's name is a household word throughout the world."

"So?"

"Yes," Witson went on, "if he has anything to say, the people will listen."

"Good!" Jetto exclaimed. "Now before I give you your instructions, let me first tell you a thing or two. We have no interest in your planet other than what we came here for. That some

things happened to have caused misery and death are a matter of regret. It was a sort of accidental slipping of a gear in our machinery. Who and what we are is no concern of yours. . . ."

"Mind if I put in my two cents?" Norton broke in.

The thin, finely-drawn face of the man on the couch broke into lines of anger, but Norton went on as if he did not see it:

"I think it is our concern. We pride ourselves on the fact that liberty, personal and national, is not a cloak that we can wear or not at any one's discretion. It is part of us, like the flesh and bone of our bodies. And when that liberty has been violated, and in the manner or rather the violent willfulness of your violating, then the people will *demand* an accounting. What were your reasons for what has happened? Why was this violence necessary?"

JETTO controlled himself with an effort that was plain to see. He spoke slowly, measuring each word for effect:

"Very well, Norton. We have come from a far universe, beyond any of your knowledge. Once we lived on this planet. Many thousands of years ago. First in huge underground cities. Then above the ground in great communities. All these cities were colonies, established by some far-sighted ancestor of mine, against the day when his mother planet would no longer support a human population. Nor was this the only planet.

"There was one other, the planet, Pa-Mura. It proved to be the better suited for us. We migrated in huge space ships, both from here and the mother planet to the one they found in outer space. But before the migration was complete, disaster struck. Cataclysms, in the form of floods and earthquakes struck and engulfed these cities.

"Great numbers of people lost their lives. Worse, certain scientific machinery was lost. It is because of that loss that we are here. We must have the machines before we depart!"

The two men before Jetto had given him their full attention. He had been aware of that from the very beginning. It was not for nothing that he was known at Jetto the Crafty. It was no longer a man, addressing them, but an actor.

The finely-drawn face was mobile in the extreme, changing with every mood. His mouth had drooped when he spoke of the catastrophe that had happened, as if he held a brief for the victims of it. His face became exalted when he spoke of the glories of his mother race. Now, his shoulders and arms lifted in supplication, as he came to the climax, to the clincher in his plea for Norton's help:

"But that is only a minor reason for our being here. Peace has been our constant companion on Pa-Mura. I was at the head of the state. And a gang, understand, a gang, seized control of the government while I was away. I had to flee for my life! But I remembered this planet and the colonies it once had. And remembered too the scientific riches they had held. Norton! I know where one of those cities is buried!

"And with your help, we will excavate for it. Neither you nor any of those who help, will be the loser for it. I promise you that!"

They were almost convinced of his sincerity. In fact, Witson was, so great an actor was Jetto. Not Norton, however. He could not give an explanation for his disbelief. Instinct told him that Jetto had not told all. That there was a part, some small or large distortion to the tale.

"You have answered my questions

fairly enough," Norton said. "But I don't understand why you want me. Witson, here, has exaggerated my importance. It may be true, as he says, that my name is a household word but that does not make me a statesman. We have a president and ruling body in Washington. Certainly they. . . ."

"I am so sorry!" Jetto interrupted. "A most unfortunate and regrettable accident happened. Because we did not know how we would be received, we had to take certain steps to make our landing safe. Your leader and certain high members of his council were in a theater at the time. . . . it was quite horrible. And because those who were in high places did not believe that his, er, accident, was not pre-meditated, they would not co-operate. So you see, we have little choice in the matter of finding a voice to explain our position."

NORTON was aghast at the words.

In a theater. He thought of another who had also been a victim of an assassin. And also in a theater. He was about to ask what happened to those who failed to co-operate, when there was an unscheduled interruption.

The double doors which opened out into the main corridor swung wildly open and a man ran in, bowing his head in quick jerks as he approached the couch. He panted out the message he had for Jetto:

"Mighty Jetto! The—Prime Number—from New York—enemy craft approaching—wants instructions!"

A terrible change came over Jetto's face. His temper, quick to burn, blazed instantly.

"Use the blast wave on them!" he shouted. "Stupid fools! Do they think to stop me? Daring to face me with their childish space ships!"

The messenger departed, as he came,

bowing and scraping. But before he quite reached the door, Norton stopped him.

"Wait!" he commanded.

The man turned, looking quickly from Norton to his leader.

"That isn't necessary," Norton lowered his voice from a shout to a conversational plane. "Let me talk to them over the radio. Let me . . ."

"No! I've listened to enough. Both to Fu-ta and you. You'll do as I say! And without reservation."

"And if I don't?" Norton asked darkly.

"Then I'll make you wish you had," Jetto answered. There was that in his voice which made chills run down Norton's back. He had not the slightest doubt that Jetto could and would keep his promise. Yet his answer was the only one he could give.

"Okay, mister," he said. "You can do your damndest. But you won't get this man to play stooge for you."

"And you can count me in on that too," came the high-pitched voice of Witson, in echo.

Jetto's face became scarlet as it filled with blood, so great was his anger. His whole body shook in the grip of it. He pointed a quivering hand at them.

"Take them away," he said venomously. "And put them into the deepest and darkest hole of a prison you can find. And let them rot there until I can think up a torture to fit their crime."

Norton and his friend were passive in the grip of the guards who had appeared as if by magic. This time they were not handled with the care that had been exercised before. They were dragged to the door. But before they were shoved through, Norton turned and laughed full in Jetto's face. It was a small but worthwhile pleasure.

Once again they were put into one of

the oddly-shaped cars. And once again there was that terrific, speedy ride. It was over in a second. The flush-door opened and they stepped out. Norton recognized the building before them, instantly. It was the old county jail.

THE dirt-grimed stones were grayness melting into grayness, each a gravestone marker to the years. In the early sixties the health department, which had been using the building, moved into its own. It had remained vacant since then. Now it was a prison once again.

An entire company of Murian warriors were deployed around the structure. Strange looking weapons were mounted at the four corners, evidence of the Murians' fear that the people's will to revolt was not entirely dead. The guards, with Norton and Witson between them, rushed through the doors. They were shoved against a wall, while the leader of the squad reported to his superior.

Most of the Murians Norton had seen were, if not pleasant looking, at least human in features. This man was neither. Something had happened to his face. It was all out of focus. His nose was squashed flat against his cheeks. A great gash had been torn from a cheek and his right eye hung down on the mutilated flesh in an unnerving stare. A sword had bitten deeply across his mouth and as a result it hung askew in an idiot's grin.

This was Tomet, their jailer!

He regarded them, malevolently for several seconds without saying anything. His right hand toyed with the stock of a lash that hung from the belt around his waist. His inspection over, he said:

"Ntho they nwon't co-operate, neh? N'nhen pwaps I c'n ndo nsomething nabout nthat."



Witson burst into a cackle of laughter and even Norton had to smile. Tomet had the body of a man, but the voice was that of a woman. And a woman with a bad lisp.

Tomet's one good eye went wide at the unexpected sound. Then the lids squeezed tight over it and with a high-pitched shriek of rage he charged at them, pulling as he ran, at the lash hanging from the belt. It came free as he skidded to a halt before them.

"Ntherel!" he shrieked, as he savagely swung the single thong across Witson's face and shoulders. "Nthere—nah—nah—nah." His voice held nothing human in it.

For the barest instant Norton was stood immobile, as if he were spell-bound by the savagery of the attack. Then he leaped to the defense of his friend. Tomet's blows had been wanton and cruel. Norton's were deliberate, cold and even more savage. For they were scientific and struck in a manner to give the most hurt without making the victim lose consciousness.

Tomet was a big man but he was dwarfed by Norton who stood several inches over six feet. The scientist struck pile driver blows, deliberately twisting his fist as it struck into the features of the jailer. Tomet's face was lacerated and torn open.

A phalanx of bodies struck Norton. The guards had come to Tomet's rescue. It was not unexpected. Even as Norton went to Witson's defense, he had taken into account the fact that he had at the most only a few seconds in which to inflict whatever damage he could. Nor was he unaware of the consequences that might occur as a result of his action. It had not swayed him in the slightest degree.

Witson went to his knees from a blow of a club in the hands of one of the guards. Norton stepped protectingly

before him and dealt out punishment by means of his fists. But it was an unequal fight. The guards had clubs and there were twenty of them pitted against him. One of them stepped back and flung his club. It struck Norton across the bridge of the nose, blinding him with pain. His arms went up in a reflexive movement to protect his eyes and in that instant the rest of the guards piled on. While some pinioned his arms, others struck with fists and clubs.

NORTON went to his knees, slowly, as a mighty tree falls. Nor did they stop beating at him, even then. It was Tomet, oddly enough, who stopped the slaughter:

"Nwait!" he shrieked. "Jetto nwants him nalive."

They jerked him roughly erect. His head hung low, chin resting against his chest. He hung laxly between the two men who held him, blood dripping in a steady stream from the cuts on his forehead and cheek. He was numb with pain. They dragged him off. Nor was he more than dimly aware of what they were doing.

"Ho, 7," one of his guards called.

Norton lifted his head at the sound of the voice.

His pain-filled eyes took in their surroundings, but in the distorted focus of one in a dream. Then the focus sharpened, his nose became aware of an odor, and his senses awakened.

He shook himself free of the restraining grips of the guards. They stepped back, their hands flying to the clubs in their belts. But he wasn't interested in them. Witson lay on the floor beside him. He went to one knee and felt with probing fingers for the pulse. It beat, but feebly. And all the while he was bent, feeling for the spark of life in Witson's body, all his senses were

aware of the horrible odor all about him. It was the foul, decaying odor of human flesh, too long in confinement and without any of the ordinary means of relief. It was as fetid and miasmatic as the air from some malarial swamp.

"What's wrong here?" a new voice rasped.

Norton lifted his head and measured the man he saw. If it was number 7, he was not a prepossessing sight. He was short and squat, with a barrel chest and arms which hung to his knees. His eyes were Mongoloid and even in the dimness of the passage, Norton saw the cruelty lying in their depths.

"They got a little rough with Tomet," one of the guards offered in explanation.

"H'm. So they're a couple of tough birds, eh? Well, two of my little birds in the third cage got sick yesterday and we had to give them a bath, in the river. That makes it just right. The cages got to be full, you know," he said and roared in laughter. He sobered up quickly and gave a command:

"Well! Don't stand there like a pair of idiots! Throw them in!"

"Wait!" Norton said quietly.

"Huh?" 7 said.

"This man needs a doctor," Norton said.

"Naw! Now ain't that too bad. Maybe he just needs a change of air. Doctor! Throw them in three cell," 7 roared.

"Jetto won't like it," Norton said slowly.

There was a second's silence.

"Go on," 7 said.

"He wants us kept alive. And I can assure you that if this man doesn't get medical attention, he'll die."

7 looked to the two guards who

nodded their heads vigorously in affirmation.

"Well, why didn't you idiots say so?" he bellowed. "Let's see," he said cocking his head to one side in thought. "Where'll we put them? Ah! I've got it! That end cell's only got one man in it. That traitor. Carry the old guy in there."

THE stench was so great, Norton breathed in shallow gasps, as they walked the length of the corridor, past the rows of cells on either side. Shrieks, groans and curses followed them in their march. The poor wretches in the cells gave voice to their hatred as best they could. The guards, Norton noticed, walked as quickly as they could even though there wasn't the slightest chance that they would be harmed.

Norton took the body of the semi-conscious Witson from them as one of them inserted the key 7 had given him into the lock. The door opened on creaking, rusty hinges. He carried the old man across the threshold and the door slammed closed. There was a slatted heavy bench on either side of the room. Norton put the figure of Witson on it.

He had been aware of a strange sound in the cell, when they came in. It was the sound of a voice humming a tune. The sound emanated from the other bench which was at the other end of the cell. He peered closely toward it and saw a figure reclining on it.

"Mind giving me a hand, here?" Norton asked.

The figure arose and came slowly forward. It was a Murian. He came and stood beside Norton who was engaged in removing Witson's outer garments. Norton threw him a glance over his shoulder. He saw a fairly tall man, slenderly built but of a ranginess that suggested hidden strength. He could

not see his face clearly in the gloomy light. Then the man bent forward to look more closely at Witson and Norton saw that the stranger was young. More, that there was intelligence, humor and strength in his features.

"H'm. Doesn't look too good," the stranger said. "7 better get the doctor here in a hurry."

Witson's breath which had been coming in shallow gasps, now had a rattling quality to it. It was obvious that he had been badly hurt. Norton forgot his own pain and wounds.

"Damn them!" he gritted through tight lips. "Where's that doctor?"

"Here, here," a voice answered in frightened tones. "Be with you in a second."

The door swung open and a man scuttled into the cell. 7's voice followed him in:

"And see to it that he lives, understand?"

"Don't worry," the doctor said in pleading tones. "I will!"

"Oh dear!" the doctor exclaimed in a frightened tone. "Why don't they have lights, so a man can see what he's doing." The fright in his voice was only part of the greater fright that possessed every part of him.

Silence answered his query. They could hear 7's footsteps slapping down the corridor.

The doctor was a frightened, little man, emaciated from hunger, whose thin face was covered with a stubble of beard. His eyes leaped from one to another in the cell in silent begging for understanding. Almost gently, Norton said:

"You're with friends. Don't be afraid."

"They were all my friends," the doctor said tearfully. "Now . . ."

Norton arose and patted the thin shoulders. The thin frame shuddered

under Norton's reassuring fingers, then stiffened, abruptly.

"I'm alright now," the doctor said. "Thanks."

Norton watched the thin, strong fingers at work. The doctor kneaded and prodded at Witson, eliciting a moan of pain, now and then. The doctor shook his head, in silent reproach.

"If only there was more light," he said softly.

NORTON thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers. He knew that in a second more he would begin hammering at the walls in futile anger. Slowly, he withdrew one of his hands. Clenched within it was a paper pad of matches.

"Will these help?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," the doctor replied excitedly. "One at a time, though. We may need them all."

He was right. To the last match. When the doctor arose, there were new lines of tiredness around his mouth. But in his eyes there was triumph.

"He'll live," he said in a low voice. "I'll give him something to ease the pain and put him to sleep for a while."

He picked up the case from which he had taken several vials of pills and a hypodermic needle. Norton, a close observer, saw that frightened as he had been, the doctor was a thorough man. He had given Witson as complete an examination as was possible under the circumstances. The doctor pulled the stopper from one of the small bottles and inserted the needle within, drawing out a small quantity of the drug it contained. He shot the whole amount into Witson's arm.

"A combination of penicillin and neoscadrine," he explained. "Lucky I had some left. It'll take care of both the shock and wounds, which are not of importance, let me assure you. The

shock is. He's not young, you know."

Norton was only half-listening. His eyes were riveted on the case. He had seen another needle in it.

"Er, doctor?"

"Yes?"

"Suppose something comes up? And you won't be here, of course. Mind if I have one of those needles?"

The doctor regarded him silently for several seconds, then smiled.

"But of course," he replied. "I understand. Here take one. You know how to use it?"

"Yes."

"Good! And here. A vial of this will prove to be of help, also."

Norton waited until the doctor had left, under the escort of one of the guards, before he opened his palm. The small vial in his palm was marked, morphine.

"Think you'll be able to use it?" the Murian asked.

Norton shrugged his shoulders. Now that the problem of Witson was solved, he felt he was able to give his full attention to this stranger from another planet.

"Am I right in thinking that, er, you are considered a traitor?" he asked.

The other smiled pleasantly and said:

"So they say. And rightly."

"What happened?"

"Well, being a prime number, I was in charge of the landing in this area. An order came through to use a certain ray. I refused. That was all."

"What is this prime number business?" Norton asked. There was more than curiosity in his question. If this man was a rebel, then they had gained an ally. His question was his opening wedge to gain the other's confidence.

"Sorry," the other said in a pleasant tone. "Of course you don't know. You see, I'm a mutation. So is 7. And any one of us who has a number instead

of a name."

"Let me get this straight," Norton said in an incredulous tone. "You are a *manufactured* being?"

"That's right."

"But you are flesh and blood."

"I might as well explain," the other said, moving to his bench and sitting down. "Here, sit by me. Your friend will be all right."

NORTON glanced at Witson and saw that he was under the influence of the drug the doctor had administered. The Murian made himself comfortable, drew one leg up on the bench and rested his chin against the knee.

"You've got to remember," he began, "that they were an old civilization when this very planet was young. And there were wise men among them. The race was dying. Their culture was dying! And so the wise men decreed that before they died out altogether, it was best that they find another planet on which to settle. But with whom? And for what posterity?"

"It was a problem that had to be settled before the migration began. We were the solution. So we were born. Fathered by a chemical formula and mothered by a test tube. It is said that there were millions of us here. There are still millions on Pa-Mura. And that is how we are thought of, as a number, into the millions."

"Incredible," Norton whispered softly. "But you are—it would be impossible to tell you from. . . ."

"Except for one basic, organic difference," the Murian said. "And with one problematical, religious difference, we are as human as you. We cannot reproduce. And being man-made, we have no soul."

"Soul?" Norton drew back in surprise. The thought that these people

had religious concepts or rather whether they had a philosophical concept of a soul had not occurred to him.

It was as if the Murian had read his mind.

"Why not?" he asked. "We had been given a mind. A mind which functioned. Therefore certain mysteries of concept of morals presented themselves and begged for an answer. It was then we discovered that we had no soul. For in the questions of evil and right, they proved to be words barren of meaning. Machines, whether they are of metal or flesh have no reason for existence beyond their immediate use. And when they are worn out, they can be discarded without any thought for their future. At least that was the condition until, oh, twenty years or so ago. I was the one responsible for the change. And that is the reason I am here!"

Norton's brain whirled from the impact of the Murian's words. Questions which once had been burning issues and because there was no one to answer them, had died, might now be answered. He listened, as a child, hearing the wonders of *Alice in Wonderland* for the first time.

"It was a woman who was responsible for the whole thing," the other went on. "Beautiful as a childhood dream. Wondrous as the birth of a new day. She," he sighed in the memory of his lost dream, "awakened in me a something which had never been known by any of us before. Love! Surprised?" he asked as Norton murmured an inaudible something. "Don't you understand? There can't be love without a soul from which to stem. Something, perhaps the great Creator, had finally taken pity upon us, or perhaps, but there's no use in idle speculation. At any rate she re-

ciprocated my feelings. And because it would have been death to have shown our love openly, we were clandestine in our meetings. We couldn't get married. But listen, Earthman, there is a man-child up there on Pa-Mura and he is mine and some day I shall go back to him.

"I think that I was the first to have realized what happened. Maybe it occurred to all of us mutations at the same time? But in the space of a second, a condition which had existed for eons no longer held. A soul had been granted us. I told you that there were wise men on that planet.

"They realized the change as quickly as we and reasoned out the cause. We were granted full liberty to do as we wished. If it hadn't been for Jetto!"

"Ah," Norton said softly. "The villain enters."

"YES," the Murian said. And Norton saw the grin on his face. It was not the sort of grin which held humor, however. Rather it was like some grimace which from torture, twisted his lips into the semblance of a smile.

"Yes," the Murian reiterated. "The villain entered. Jetto the crafty, ruler of the chief city, Pa-Mura. Vain, filled with a consciousness of his power, a treacherous man, who was said to have gained his rule through treachery, he hated the thought of giving us freedom. So he evolved a grand scheme of revolt.

"To the great number of us mutations, a new way of life had been opened. There were moral reasons for our actions. But to some, and I cannot say why, there was no change at all. Jetto attempted to organize these into a band which would openly rebel against those in authority. There were a great number of them and it might



have succeeded. But he wanted all the mutations to be part of the revolt.

"We not only refused but went to the Great Council and told them of his plan. War had not been known on Pa-Mura for a long time. And the weapons they had were terrible in their effects. They debated what to do. And Jetto, learning he had been betrayed, struck first. He almost succeeded in doing what he wanted. But there were too many against him. So he took those who were allied with him and using almost the entire space navy of Pa-Mura, set out for this planet. He vowed he would return and obliterate Pa-Mura with the weapons he would bring with him. But now I wonder."

"About what?"

"Whether he will return. If he finds what he set out to, there will be none who could stand up to him here. And I think that will please him more than having to go back there and take the chance of fighting and maybe not winning."

A faint snore interrupted their talk. Witson had fallen into a natural sleep. The noises of the other prisoners had died down. The two in the cell seemed to be the only ones alive in all the prison. And Norton had the oddest feeling that they too were dead. The dead speaking of the dead in hushed whispers, as if it would have made any difference had they shouted. Norton didn't think for a single second that Jetto intended to leave them go free.

"If he finds . . . I thought he knew," Norton asked.

"Only the general location. I am the only one who knows the specific point. That was why he kidnapped me."

"F'r the love of heaven, man! Don't dawdle so!" Norton broke off in exasperation.

"Sorry," the other murmured. "You

see, from the time of our incubation, we have had our paths chosen for us. Mine was science. By the time I reached maturity, I knew what I wanted. Ethnology the study of man. I attained high honors and was made head of the department at our highest university. As such, I had charge of all the records of the expeditions which our peoples had made to other planets. Jetto knew that. What he didn't know, was that I wouldn't tell. So I am here. And no matter what he intends to do, I still won't tell."

"Ethnology, eh? Well, Witson and you'll have a time," Norton said reflectively. "He's got some odd ideas, that will probably interest you. But what I want to know, is what made you land in such places as this city and others of like importance?"

"Oh that," the Murian passed it off lightly. "Our space ships are equipped with devices which enabled us to see, long before we were even close, what the situation would be. Jetto planned a landing and the use of the ray to inflict as many casualties as was possible. Then too, the after effect of the ray he used makes people lethargic and easily led. Each of your large cities had a quota of men assigned to it."

"I think I've got the whole picture, now," Norton said. "His idea was to kill off as many as he could. Then take advantage of the panic which was bound to ensue. Before the people could recover their senses, he was boss. But I don't get what he wants?"

"Power," was the answer. "He's had it for a long time. It doesn't make any difference over whom. It's just the idea. He wants to have the say about everything. And if he gets to the bad lands of Utah, he will have that power."

"Is that where the buried city is located?"

"Yes."

NORTON whistled shrilly through his teeth, a habit of his boyhood days.

"That is the reason," the Murian went on, "why we landed on this part of the continent. We observed that the greater part of the population lived to the east of a large river. . . ."

"The Mississippi," Norton interjected.

". . . it was obvious then, that we had to gain control of that section of the country."

Norton moved away from the other and sat at his ease, leaning back against the wall. The Murian watched him for a moment, then seeing that Norton wanted to be alone in his thoughts, moved off, to stand against the bars of their cell.

The Murian turned at the sound of a sigh from Norton.

"What of yourself and your friend? How did you incur the enmity of Jetto?"

Norton related what had happened to him and closed with:

"So I guess that we are in the same boat. And from appearance sake, I'd say the boat had an awfully large leak."

"You mean this prison? Remember that we have the needle the doctor gave you. And that one guard looks like another. Tell me, was it still daylight when you were brought here?"

"Y-yes," Norton replied. "Why?"

"Because I am of the opinion that the night is about ended. I know how to operate one of our destroyers. All we have to do is get free. That's where the needle comes in."

"I don't get it," Norton was puzzled.

The Murian grinned broadly and lay down at full length on the bench. A series of horrible groans came from his

lips. Norton's lips twisted in a smile. He knew what the other was driving at.

"Guard!" he shouted. "Guard! Help, quick. This man's dying."

There was a few seconds silence. Then other prisoners became aware of Norton's continuing shouts. A cacophony of shrieks, groans, curses and screams filled the air. Then there was the voice of the guard shouting for silence. And above all the other voices was heard the stentorian one of Norton, still calling for help.

Norton heard the guard approach and ran back to the bench on which the other lay, doubled up in such a way that his back was to whoever made an examination.

The cell door squealed open. A hand descended on Norton's shoulder, pushing him to one side. The guard knelt and tried to pull the stricken man over to where he could see what was wrong. And as he knelt, Norton inserted the needle into the small vial the doctor had left with him. When he withdrew it the needle was full of a whitish substance. He turned to see if the guard had come alone. He had.

Norton's right hand went around the guard's mouth and before the man knew what had happened, the needle had gone in for its entire length into the jugular vein. Norton held him for the space of a minute. When he released him, the guard slumped to the floor. His body had barely touched the floor when the Murian was tearing at his clothes and handing them to Norton.

The last thing he took was the guard's belt and a small metallic something which resembled a water pistol.

"Now," the Murian said, as Norton finished dressing. "I defy anyone to tell the difference. Here's what we do. I'll carry the old man. You'll fol-

low close behind. Be sure that you hold the gun close to my back, for realism sake. Only keep your hand from the trigger. The corridor is dark enough so that there won't be much chance of anyone guessing what happened. There's a barred door at the head of the stairs. At this hour, I don't think more than one man will be at the door. I'll stall him for a moment. Stay close behind. If he shows the slightest suspicion press on the trigger. It'll blast him to hell. From then on we're on our own. Let's go!"

NORTON heard the sound of the prisoner's catcalls all the way up the stairs. He concentrated on hearing them. And when they made the turn into the last landing, he was sorry that he could no longer hear them. For from here on he knew that reality might be only a figment of his imagination. Then the steel bars of the last door between them and freedom stood before them.

At the sound of their approaching footsteps, a man arose from a low stool on which he had been taking his ease.

"Who goes?" he asked, yawning broadly as if the answer was a foregone conclusion. But it was a formula which had to be gone through.

"This man—he is ill, dying," Norton's cell mate answered.

Norton, pressing close to the other, saw the guard's eyes go wide as he recognized first, Witson, then the man carrying him.

"Where's his friend?" he demanded.

"The guard wouldn't let him come," the Murian said. "Said it would be too hard to watch us both."

As the guard stepped forward to open the door, Norton moved to one side, so that the guard couldn't see him. It wasn't until they were all in the enclosure that the keeper realized some-

thing was wrong. The Murian, with Witson in his arms, had continued walking to the head of the short flight of stairs leading to the upper part of the prison. Norton continued to avert his head, as he went past the keeper. It was that which made him suddenly suspicious.

"Wait a minute, you!" he called.

When they continued without heeding his command, he ran after them and grabbed Norton by an arm. It was his last act. Norton turned and blasted him with the gun. There was a blinding flash of white light from the muzzle, a light which ended in the keeper's throat. His mouth opened and his eyes went wide. Then he buckled at the knees and toppled slowly forward on his face.

"There's a rear to this building, isn't there?" the Murian asked quickly.

"Yes," Norton answered, assuming the lead.

He made off at a run for the stairs. But not the ones before them. There was another series he knew of which were around the bend, past the desk which used to house the lock-up keeper. At the head of those stairs was a narrow passage which in turn led to a steel door, the freight door.

The Murian panted behind him, Witson's still slumbering body bobbing up and down in the man's arms.

Norton took the stairs, three at a time. But he came to an abrupt halt at the head. There was a bi-secting corridor to be transversed before they could reach the safety of the alley. He threw up a hand in warning and the Murian panted to a stop beside him. Then he also heard what had brought Norton to a halt.

It was the sound of approaching footsteps, marching in the regular rhythm of soldier's steps.

"Damn!" the Murian muttered.

"The changing of the guard."

He was right: A file of men stepped smartly into view. There were eight of them in a column of twos. At their head marched one who was their leader, for he was marking time in a low, cadence count. And before the three at the head of the stairs could retreat, they were seen. The guard's surprise was the greater.

Norton didn't wait to see what would happen. He let go once more with the deadly weapon in his hand. Again there was the blinding spurt of white light. Only this time Norton held the trigger down constantly and used the gun in a spray effect. It was terrible in effect. They were as the blades of grass before the steel teeth of the lawn mower. And when he released the trigger, there were only parts of bodies on the floor. The power of the light was fantastic. Whatever it struck was simply consumed as by a holocaust. Norton's gorge rose as he smelled the odor which came to meet them when they ran past the bodies of the guards.

The door was unlocked. It took a second to lift it. Nor did they worry that it squealed in the process. Safety was too close.

They stood motionless for a moment, breathing in great gulps of the chilly night air.

"What—what happened?" a shrill voice asked.

Witson had finally come out of his drugged sleep.

The Murian set him on his feet. He swayed weakly for a second or two, then recovered quickly. Witson was an old man but there was something of steel in his body, the way he took his knocks and came back for more.

"We'll explain later," Norton said, as he peered up and down the alleyway. He knew that there wasn't much time. The bodies of the men he had

killed might be discovered at any moment.

"Come," the Murian said. "I know the way from here."

His pace was slower this time, as if he expected that they might meet someone. And men running in the early hours of the morning are targets of suspicious looks. They couldn't afford to be stopped.

A street lamp shed a feeble glow over the barren street. Dawn was but an hour away. The Murian gave the seemingly empty street a thorough going over with his eyes before he permitted them to venture past the alley mouth. And then not before he gave them final instructions.

"Listen carefully now," he said. "Our destroyer fleet is parked on the lake front. Give me an hour's time. Then meet me at the monument of the Indian horsemen."

He was just another shadow on the street, as he sidled along. Then he was part of the darkness.

AT THAT very moment Jetto was giving his final instructions for the Murian conquest of the United States. His cruel eyes looked contemptuously at the men gathered about him in the huge office.

"I am done with talk!" his voice shrilled at them. "Especially yours, Fu-ta! Who can oppose us? And if they do, they'll get the same dose I meted out to the fools who came to stick their noses into our affairs."

"I don't think that will be the last of them, Jetto," Fu-ta said softly.

"No? Well, if there will be more, they too will get the same reception."

"What of the people here?" Fu-ta demanded.

Jetto, who had been pacing back and forth before the councilors, whirled at the words. They shrank from the look

of fury in his face. All but Fu-ta.

"I will do with them as I did with the two who were here earlier. Worsel! I will make this the land of the damned for them. And that reminds me, Prime Number, 1, is down there. Another who thinks to defy me. Wait until I tell him of his child: it will do me good to see the knave's face when I tell him what will happen if he doesn't do as I say."

"Jetto!" Fu-ta's voice suddenly rang out. "The die has been cast. We chose to come with you. But this is not Pa-Mura! We are on foreign soil. And but a handful among enemies. You have scattered our forces over a large area. Bring them here!"

Jetto bit his lips in vexation. Fu-ta was right. Fu-ta was always right! Some day the man would have to be removed. Already some of the others were begging to question him also. A benign smile made its way to his mouth.

"Did Fu-ta think I was going to let them stay there till eternity?" he asked with a sweetness that was a cutting rebuke to the man who dared to question his judgment. "That damned mutation will give in, mark my words, and when he does, we will go out to the hidden spot. But first I must recruit the labor."

"You won't do it by having the ones who *can* do it for you, thrown into jail," Fu-ta said.

Ganto, the scribe, looked up at the words. He had been an interested spectator to the play between the two men.

"If we don't stop killing them off, soon there won't be enough of them to build a hut," he said in his gentle, unobtrusive way.

"What do you mean?" Jetto asked.

"The ray we loosed on them accounted for more than half the population. When we were forced to use the blast power on them, we killed off an-

other third. And since we were indiscriminate in the use of our force, many were killed who could have been put to use."

Jetto's eyes rolled in his head. These mites and their way of looking at trifles. As if it mattered whether he killed off the whole population. That would make everything simple, then. Didn't they know yet, that he had no intention of returning to Pa-Mura.

"All right," he said in resignation. "What do you want me to do?"

"There isn't much you can do, I'm afraid," Ganto said. "But let us make some sort of arrangement with them for good will. Those two who were here this afternoon. Call them back. Let us talk to them."

"Very well," Jetto said in agreement.

TOMET the jailer yawned broadly.

Damn them anyway! Waking a man from a sound sleep. Didn't they ever go to bed? He looked angrily at the messenger, who returned the look with one of indifference.

"Ought to ghet nhrid of nhe thcum," he grunted, as he got to his feet. "'nstead of nputting nthem in nhail. Nh'm. Nmaybe 'hat's what Njetto whants to nhdo, eh?"

The messenger shrugged his shoulders.

Tomet gave him a sour look and shuffled off down the stairs which led to the cells. The messenger sat down in the vacant chair and waited for his return. It wasn't long.

Tomet literally erupted from the stairs. His mis-shapen face was grey, his eyes stared in wild dis-belief and his twisted mouth twitched.

"Gone—gone," he babbled hysterically. "All three. And the guards—blasted! The whole lot of them!"

The messenger didn't wait to hear any more. Swiftly, he turned and ran



from the room.

\* \* \*

Number 1 peered cautiously around the corner of the building. The street was empty of life. His eyes narrowed in speculation. He knew too well, the risk he was taking. And the consequences of being caught. But in that low, walled building across the way were a dozen men who would join him at a word. And he needed them badly.

A sentry walked across the path of his vision. And a broad grin spread across the watcher's face. It was double 7. The sentry whirled at the whispered sound which came to him from across the still-dark street. His fingers toyed restlessly with the blast pistol in his hand. Then he recognized the man who stepped out from the darkened doorway and a look of incredulous unbelief spread across his features. Quickly, he ran to the other and embraced him in greeting.

"I—I thought, why we were told that Jetto had executed you," he said.

"Fah!" the other replied. "You know Jetto. That would have been the sensible thing to do. But not he. Torture first. So this little bird flew the coop. But tell me, are our friends still with us?"

Double 7 went wide-eyed at the question.

"But of course," he said in a hurt voice, as if he was surprised that the other should even ask such a thing.

Number one sighed in relief. "Good!" he exclaimed. Then he gave orders as though it was the natural thing to do and not as if he was a hunted man. "We can't work in half measures now, things are coming to a head, I'm sure. And I've got to beat Jetto to the punch. Go back to the barracks and tell Number 9 to follow through with the plan we conceived. Kill all those who are not with us and don't have any qualms

about killing them. Then get several patrol cars and meet me at the space port on the lake front."

The other had been following Number 1 intently. When his leader finished, the sentry turned and left without a further word.

THE Loop was dark. Darker than Norton had ever remembered it being. And quiet. With the unearthly quiet of a thing dead, yet having life. They were but two more shadows among the many of the street.

A patrol car came around the corner and the two men melted into the shadows of a building's entrance. A headlight swept across the panes of glass. Then the car passed from view. The two came into the open again.

"Do you mean to tell me," Norton asked, halting their progress momentarily for his question, "that they have so enslaved the people in the two weeks since they've been here, that they are afraid to come out at night?"

"It would be instant death for anyone," Witson said.

Norton shuddered. His mind had pictured once again the scenes of carnage he had come across. If they could only get to the coast? The Murian *had* to get to his friends!

Another car made its presence known. Again they flattened themselves against a wall. And again they remained undetected.

"Who is this man who has gone for help?" Witson asked.

Norton told him what had happened while he was unconscious. They continued their stealthy advance while Norton talked. At the end of his tale, they found themselves facing the broad stretch of Michigan Boulevard. The Mestrovic monument was directly across from them. Norton gave the thoroughfare a hurried glance. It was

deserted. Motioning with his head for Witson to follow, he started across the street—and one of the patrol cars turned the corner of the next street.

The two men were caught full in the headlights of the car.

Norton ran full speed for the far curb. But *before* he got there, he heard a moaning cry behind him. Turning his head, he saw that Witson had stumbled to his knees. And saw too, that the car was bearing down on the fallen man. Whirling, he ran back to Witson. He ran bent low, like a football player with the ball. When he got to Witson, he bent and without losing speed caught him up in his arms.

There was a screeching sound from a few feet away and Norton turned a horrified face in the direction of the sound. The car was almost on them. Suddenly there was a blinding flash of light. And hard on its heels there came the sound of an explosion and Norton spun around in the wake of the concussion, but even as he fell, he twisted his body around so that it was protecting Witson.

"Are you all right, my friend?" a voice asked.

Norton turned his head. The gray, dawning light showed him who it was. The Murian! Norton rolled away from Witson, who was muttering profanely. He felt himself all over.

"Y-yes. I think so. How are you Witson?"

"Like the football at the bottom of a pileup, a little flattened but none the worse from wear," the chipper little man said, arising and dusting himself.

Norton followed the other's example, looking curiously about him as he did so. The patrol car was a mass of twisted, blackened wreckage. Three, sleep-looking, torpedo-shaped cars were lined up at the curb. The ugly snouts of strange looking guns protruded from

open ports in the sides of the cars.

"Good!" the Murian exclaimed in relief. "Let's go, then. We haven't much time. Jetto knows that we have escaped."

The name was a spur to their feet. Quickly they followed the Murian to the car. He made room for them on the wide seat. Three men sat beside the driver.

"Lucky for you my men spotted me as I was walking along," he said. "They would never have stopped otherwise. And of course I recognized you both."

"Lucky so far," Norton reminded him. "Let's hope our luck will hold out."

"I see you still have the blast pistol," the Murian said, looking down at the belt around Norton's waist. "We'll need more than luck from here in. We're going in shooting. Better stick close to my side."

THE driver had turned the car until it faced the grassy parkway on the east side of the street. Then he let out the throttle and he zoomed across the park. In a matter of seconds, they were at the wire enclosure which barred the huge air strip that had been constructed at the foot of Congress Street. The other cars pulled up behind them and grim-faced, silent men piled out to form a group about Norton's friend.

"When we get to the gate," the Murian said, "Number 4 will take the lead. If it's barred we'll have to blast it down. If not—then watch me and do as I do."

They nodded in silent agreement.

The first faint streaks of rose tinged the east, as they arrived at the gate. It wasn't barred. A sentry leaned somnolently against the gate. He gave them a cursory glance as they passed him. He didn't notice that they weren't all dressed alike. The last man through,

slowed down and walked back to the sentry. Norton turned to see what happened. He saw only the faintest streak of light, as the sentry stiffened, then fell to the ground.

To the right, about a hundred yards off, the control tower gleamed in a sudden, rosy reflection of light. Norton detected a faint movement on its serrated top. Now their movements quickened. Ahead he saw the gleaming shapes of huge space ships. Interspersed among them were the smaller, more sleek-looking ones that were the destroyers.

A voice came rumbling down at them from the control tower:

"Halt!"

They paid no attention to the voice.

"Halt or I blast!" the rumbling voice warned.

Norton's lips tightened. He couldn't see the man who was doing the shouting. It was all too evident that they were at his mercy. But the band of ten moved on.

The white glare of a spotlight came swinging around in their direction. It was the signal for pandemonium to break loose.

A group of men burst from the control tower. Another group came running from the far corner of the airport, where there was a building which in ordinary times, had housed the personnel of the field. And between the racing groups were the parked goals of the space ships.

"Let 'em have it!" Number 1 shouted as he broke into a run.

In a second the field was criss-crossed by searching fingers of white lights, which held death for anyone caught in their beams. Ahead of him, Norton saw a man fall, to lie in a tortured, twisted heap. Something made him look up to the tower once more. He saw a man wheeling a massive shape onto a plat-

form. He didn't need more than one glance to know that it was a piece of artillery. Forgetting all else, Norton let the others run on as he knelt and took careful aim at the figure on the parapet.

He watched with a spell-bound interest, as the beam of light went up from the muzzle of his pistol. He saw the stones crumble when the light struck the edge of the parapet. The light crept higher in a race with the man, who seemed to be having trouble with the field piece. Just as it reached him, he moved behind the gun. The light struck the gun. There was a tremendous blast of sound and the gun, man and entire roof of the tower went up in a flash of flame.

Then Norton arose and raced for the ship which was their goal. Already Number 1 had reached it. In a few seconds they had all scrambled through its door. Norton panted to a stop and a hand reached out and literally lifted him through the hatchway. It clanged shut behind him.

Seven men sat in attitudes of exhaustion on a long bench which ran the length of the ship. The eighth was at the helm of the ship. Norton's suddenly quivering legs dragged themselves to the bench. He sat there for several minutes, gasping in long, shallow breaths. Beside him, Witson sat and stared through the glassed-in ports. There was something so odd in his expression that Norton followed his glance.

They should have been in bright sunlight. Instead, only the pitch black of outer space met his look. Yet he hadn't even known that they had started, so smooth was the take off. The man at the helm turned his head and said:

"All right, men, man the blast-guns!"

Instantly, those who had been sitting, seemingly so exhausted that it appeared as if nothing could make them move, leaped to their feet.

"There," one of them said, pointing to a seat set into the wall of the ship," is a gun. Make yourself fast, because this ship is gonna go through an awful lot of movement. Press the trigger on the gun in jerks. And shoot at anything that comes in range."

The gun mount reminded Norton of the ones set into the jet propelled planes he had made for the government. Beyond that, there was a vast difference in the crafts. This one had blinding speed. He couldn't understand how the pilot managed maneuvers at such a pace.

OF THOSE who had come into the ship, only Witson remained seated. The rest were at the guns. Norton looked through the aperture before him. He saw the ship's nose was pointed downward. The Earth and ship approached each other at a speed which dizzied him. Then the pilot flattened the ship out and Norton saw the field, directly below.

He pressed at the trigger, but too late. They had already passed it. The others had not been so slow. In the single glance he had before the plane passed, he saw the parked planes dissolve into rubble, saw huge craters open in the ground. And again there was the transition from light to pitch blackness.

"Norton!" a voice called.

He turned and saw the pilot motioning him forward.

"Sit here," the other said when Norton reached him.

Norton took the seat. Before him stretched a wide, curving glass which gave him a clear view of everything in front. It curved to such a degree, in fact that he was even permitted a downward view. The Earth was a huge ball, radiating a beautiful silvery light.

"Listen," the pilot said. "There's a small chance that we might wreck every plane on the field, before they have a

chance to send up help for them. Think we ought to take a chance?"

"No!" Norton replied instantly. "Head for the coast. If we can make it there, I think I can organize things to give Jetto a plenty hot reception, when and if he gets to the bad lands."

The Murian nodded his head in slow agreement.

"That makes sense," he said. "But let's see what the rest think of the plan."

He did something to the controls, turned and called to the rest who crowded around the two in the pilots' compartment.

"The Earthman speaks sense," he said in conclusion. "At best we can only wreck the ships on this field. If we can reach his friends he feels that they will be able to do something. I leave it to you."

They fell in with Norton's suggestion instantly. For the most part they were young, eager faced men, the stamp of adventure high on their foreheads. But there were two there, who were older. One of these snapped his fingers suddenly. And Norton saw his face take on a pallor at odds with its naturally ruddy complexion.

"I—I forgot in the excitement. Number 1, there is something you must know. Your son . . ."

The color fled the pilot's face.

"Wh—what . . ." his voice broke. "What of my son?"

"Jetto has him," the other said.

A look of horror came alive on the pilot's face at the other's words. He opened his mouth but the words would not come.

"I meant to tell you before," the older man said, compassion deep in his tone. "He knew how you felt about his revolt. And so he kidnapped the boy just before we sailed. It was his trump card over you, and I think he will use it."

The pilot knew what he meant.

"I swear it," he said slowly and in a voice which held no sign of emotion, "that if he harms a single lock of the child's hair that I will come back and tear out his heart! With my bare hands!"

He turned and looked for a long moment into the faces of those pressed around him. Then he said:

"We go to seek Norton's friends."

THEY turned and went back to their places at the guns. Only Norton saw the other's face twist in hidden grief. There was nothing he could say—or do. He peered through the window. Anything, so that he would not have to look at the other. And saw a silver streak pass them, a silver streak which suddenly glowed redly.

The pilot must have seen it too, for he suddenly called, "guns! Quick! Fore they blast us."

The ship was suddenly rocked from stem to stern. Norton was thrown against the instrument panel as the pilot heeled the ship over in a sudden maneuver. Then he stood it on its nose and gave it full throttle. Norton wiped the blood from his nose and watched with breathless interest, as the two ships raced through the black skies.

Once again the ship was rocked as a blast took effect just to the stern of it. It had not been hit, but so terrific was the concussion it threw the ship around as if it were a leaf. The gunners in their ship were not losing time or motion. Despite the suddenness of the pilot's maneuvering, they triggered their guns as calmly as though the ship was on the ground. A voice, loud, yet with that quality that told it was coming from a speaker announced its presence:

"This is Jetto, your chieftain! I give you one chance to come back. Or I will

have you destroyed."

The Murian's eyes closed, as if in prayer. But the words were calm, as if he had long had them under consideration:

"Blast away! We damn you! And whatever you do!"

"Then die, traitors!"

Norton's eyes went wide when he saw what the other ship was doing. As if in answer to his wonder, there came over the speaker, Jetto's command to the pilot of the pursuing ship:

"Ram them!"

It was a command to suicide! And the pilot obeyed, blindly and without question. He turned the nose of his ship in their direction and put the throttle full speed ahead.

They had been miles apart. But in the twinkling of an eye, the distance narrowed as if by magic. The speed was not the only thing which held Norton spellbound. It was the simple physical fact of the ship's approach. It had been the size of a pea, a silver pea in the black of space. Now it was a silver orange—now the size of the moon—then it seemed to fill all of the universe. And the Murian at the controls of their ship seemed to be completely unaware of their danger.

"The button—on that panel in front of you," he said suddenly.

Norton roused from the spell of approaching doom.

"Yes?"

"Press it when I give the word."

Norton didn't have time to say Jack Robinson.

"Now!" came the command.

They were so close, Norton saw the face of the pilot. Saw the look on his face. It was as if terror, fear, hatred and an odd look of resolve were struggling for supremacy, all the while his hands were at the throttle.

Norton's fingers pressed at the but-



ton, pressed so hard it seemed as if he was going to drive it through the instrument panel. Then the whole sky was filled with an orange glare. Something in the center of that glare glowed with the bright whiteness of molten metal. Then they passed through the brightness and he heard the sound of things metallic striking against the sides of the ship.

He had blown the other ship to bits with one blast of his gun!

A voice shrieked imprecations at them:

"Damn you! You won't get away with this. I have your son; don't forget! Come back or by the Four Forces, I'll have him torn to bits."

The pallor of the pilot's face was pitiful to see. But the lines of determination on his face only deepened as he savagely twisted at the knob of a dial. The voice was no longer heard.

"Be there in a short while. Any place you want us to come in to?" the pilot asked.

Norton looked bewildered. He was as if he were in a fog. The other noticed the look of bewilderment.

"Just name the place," he said. "I'll put us down there."

"It's just outside Los Angeles," Norton said.

Once again the other twisted at a knob and the ship's nose went down. Instantly it was daylight. And Norton saw the familiar serrated edges of the Rockies below. And in the twinkling of an eye, the blue waters of the Pacific were meeting his gaze.

HE PEERED intently through the glass. There it was, gleaming in all the colors of the rainbow, Los Angeles. Slowly the torpedo-shape descended. And a dozen planes rose to meet it. The Murian's lips tightened, and his brows drew down into a frown.

All their plans could go for nought if they opened fire, without first permitting them to land. He knew such would have been the case on Pa-Mura. It was the moment they had not taken into account and a moment which tried their souls.

But the planes which met them, came only as harbingers of welcome. But Norton noticed, as did the Murian, that the pilots their guns stripped for action . . . in case.

They followed the torpedo-shape down, until it came to rest on the concrete of the huge airport.

Norton was the first to step from the hatchway. And the first face to greet his eyes was the dour one of one of his dearest friends, Eldon Hale.

Hale's recognition was instant.

"Dale Norton," he gasped. Then as Witson followed Norton, "Jarvis Witson, by all that's holy!"

Then they were a close knit group, pounding each other's shoulders. Norton released himself from his friend's grasp and looked curiously about him. The airport was filled with armed men. Hundreds of the jet-propelled planes he had invented for the government were parked on the several aprons of the runways.

"What goes here?" he asked.

"What goes!" Hale parroted. "Good heavens, man! Where have you been in the last few weeks, that you ask that?"

The concerted shout of thousands of voices made Norton whirl about. He saw the reason for it. The Murians had descended from the ship. Quickly, he ran to the group and throwing his arms about the shoulders of their leader, pulled him with him. The rest followed.

"This is" . . . he stopped short, realizing that he had not the time for detailed explanations. He was going

to introduce the Murian by the number he was known as. "This is my friend. *Our friend!* He is going to help us against our enemies."

"Then you know about what has happened?"

"Perhaps more than you," Norton said. "What's the idea of all these ships out here?"

"Why—we were going to try to get through to the east," Hale replied.

"You mean this is the first time that you have tried to get through?"

"No! But this time we were determined to succeed."

"Wouldn't have done any good. You'd have been so many pigeons for them. Uh, uh. I've got other plans. Give them orders to stand by. Then we'll go over to your place and talk over my plans and you'll see what you think of it."

Several men in uniform had come over while Norton and Hale were talking and had listened in on the conversation. Norton recognized one of them as one of the highest ranking officers in the army air force.

"So you have something in mind for them, eh, Norton," the officer said.

"That's right, General. I warn you, however, that my plans are neither orthodox, nor in a strict sense, military. But in the case of the present they will work for the best—at the least cost."

"Then I'll be glad to hear them," the officer replied.

Hale put his home completely at the disposal of Norton and his friends. Witsen experienced a complete letdown after the hectic weeks he had spent. But Norton felt exhilarated and rejuvenated at the realization that here at last was the chance for action. He had taken a bath and had changed his garments for clean ones. He was clean shaven, although his skin was still showing the bruises and discolorations

of the beatings he had taken. He had found an old beret which he put on to cover the hideous scars of his lacerated scalp.

THE living room of the Hale home faced the sea, from the hilltop on which he had built it. It was a peaceful scene. The terrors of the past were a long time past, in the quiet of the room. But in the tense features of the men grouped around the huge table was to be seen a fear of the future. They knew how terrible was the enemy's power.

The eight Murian mutations were grouped in a body at one end of the table. Norton deliberately joined them. The quiet murmur of voices died down at his entrance.

"Gentlemen," Norton began in somber tones. "I think we can leave what happened to the historians. What we are or should be interested in, is the future. From personal observations, backed up by the intimate knowledge of my friends here, I can say with certainty that we haven't the slightest chance of waging a successful war with the means we have, such as planes, tanks and guns.

"No! The fastest plane I have ever devised is no match for even one of their freighters. If Jetto, their leader, so wants it, he can devastate this entire continent. Luckily, he doesn't want to do that just yet. He is interested in one thing only, at the present time. A region in the heart of the bad lands of Utah.

"I say a region because I cannot be more specific. Only my friend here," he placed his hand on Number, I's shoulder, "knows the *exact* location. I imagine that after our escape, Jetto realized that he had best get to this region as quickly as possible. Tell me," he turned to the Murian, "do you

think he'll be able to find the city without your help?"

"Yes," the Murian said. "He knows the approximate area. And he has certain men in his party who can determine the exact spot after certain calculations. But that will take a while, *after they reach the general location.*"

"That's the answer I had hoped to hear," Norton said enthusiastically. "Now here's what I have in mind. This Jetto will see to it that any interference from the *air* will be suicidal. I imagine he will post air patrols to cover any large scale land attempts to reach him, attempts by tanks for example, or truck. That type of mobile warfare is out. But we have a means that can avail. *The Westerner!* The horse-man!"

The men around the table had been giving him undivided attention all the time he had talked. But at the mention of, horseman, a hubbub of talk broke out. Some ridiculed the idea. Others spoke for use of air power, still others urged mobile troops against the enemy. Then a voice broke against the general talk:

"It makes sense!" the ranking General said. "And I for one am for it. Let's hear Norton out."

"Thank you, sir," Norton said. He waited for silence to fall, his tall figure, vibrant with a hidden power, arresting in its confidence. They fell under the spell of it as he continued to give the details of his plan. "The three bordering states of Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada were all cavalry stations not so long in the past. It is only in the last two years that they were no longer used as such. But the government still maintained large stocks of horses there. Am I right, General?"

"Right."

"Then I propose that as the commanding officer in this area you com-

mandeer those stocks. Send authorizations by messenger in fast patrol planes. We'll use every cowboy, every old cavalry man, any and all who can ride a horse."

HE LEFT his place at the table and walked over to the walled section of the room. A huge map of the western states hung suspended from the ceiling. Norton pointed to three cities on the map and continued:

"At Goldfield, Nevada; at Santa Fe, New Mexico; and at Falstaff, Arizona; we will establish staging bases for the assemblage of our horse cavalcade. Everything will be done at night so as to escape all attention from Jetto's men. Time, however, is the essence of which our success is distilled. Sir," he asked the General, "do you think that you will be able to establish the proper contacts and correlate all activities in a week?"

"Yes," came the succinct answer.

"Very well, then! For that is all it should take for me to do my part. As you gentlemen know, my field is thermodynamics. I had completed a new heat ray, an improvement on the one which I invented for jet-propelled vehicles, and decided that I needed a vacation. Hale, I hope you still have those blue prints?"

"That I have, my bucko friend," the dour-faced man said smiling broadly. "And as your partner, I thought that since they were complete, why we might just as well put the machines into production. After all, their purpose was to provide this country with a weapon which would make it invincible in war. Yes, Dale, I wanted to surprise you on your return."

Norton's face was alive with joy. Good old sour-face! Wait till Jetto got a taste of these things! They'd make his blast guns seem like toys!

"How many have we?" he asked.

"Enough to equip all the men the General can give us."

"There you are, sir," Norton said.

"Leave it to me. One week!"

\* \* \*

FIVE days later, a huge cavalcade of motor cars left Los Angeles by three different roads. They left in the still and dark of night. And each section of these motorcades had a different destination. In the lead car of the one bound for Santa Fe, were Norton, his Murian friend, and Witson. The smooth surface of the concrete led for speedy driving. Norton's plans called for their arrival before the night had ended.

"It'll be almost impossible to detect us," Norton explained. "We'll travel without lights. Each car has had a special paint job that will not reflect light and more, so camouflaged that from the air, they will seem part of the ground."

"You did a wonderful job, Dale," Witson said.

"Thanks. But the real job will come when we arrive in the area of operations. If our schedule works as planned, we should be an army of ten thousand men. Enough! What do you think, my friend?"

The Murian, to whom Norton had addressed the question merely shrugged his shoulders. He knew the power Jetto held and was capable of letting loose. And Norton's weapon was untried, as yet. Until he saw it in effect, he couldn't answer. His thoughts were also on his son, captive in the hands of the tyrant. He shuddered inwardly. If anything happened to the boy. . . .

Norton saw the look of concentration and guessed the reason for it. His own face mirrored the grim determination in his breast. Jetto and his minions must be wiped from the face of the

earth!

It was the hour before dawn when the caravan of cars entered the outskirts of the picturesque city. At the very edge of town a road block had been established. Armed men in nondescript clothes patrolled the highway. Some were mounted, some, afoot. Hooded flashlight gleams broke the blackness of night. Their car stopped at a command given by several men. One of them came forward and thrust his head in through the window. In the dim light, Norton saw only a beaked nose and slitted eyes.

"Norton?" the man asked.

"I'm Norton."

"Good! Right on time. Colonel Conners and his men are in the X-2 corral. We've got markers on the road. Follow it until the marker to the cut-off. Somebody there'll direct you to quarters."

The road led through the heart of town. There was an odd holiday air manifest. People stood about in large groups. Mounted men rode in constant parade through the main street. Voices came to them, like the distant murmur of a muted wind in the first blow of a storm.

A highway marker gleamed momentarily and showed that the road took a turn at that point. A half dozen men were stationed there as traffic guides. Their flashlights waved them around the curve. Another few minutes and they were in open country. Then another road block. Once more a face in the open window, this one chubby, with open, grinning mouth showing snuff-stained teeth.

"Yore Norton, reckon. The boss man's waitin'. I'll ride the sideboard—show ye the way."

The X-2 was the largest ranch in all New Mexico. A wire fence opened in a modest sort of way to the tremendous

acreage it encompassed. Norton became aware of a vast movement in the semi-dark area of the huge compound. There was the constant sound of whinnying horses and the smell of their sweat. The road led in a winding path to the center of a large cluster of low-roofed houses.

"This is it," said their guide.

A tall, slender man, lean with the taut hunger look of an athlete, detached himself from the group of uniformed men huddled around a large, plain table, on which Norton caught a glimpse of maps. He advanced with outstretched hand.

"I'm Conners," he said.

Norton grasped the hand and introduced his companions. Conners gave the Murian a masked look of curiosity but only nodded in greeting.

"Well, Colonel," Norton said. "I've combed all of Hollywood for men who could ride and shoot. There are six hundred of us out there."

"And a thousand here," Conners volunteered. "All armed," he continued in afterthought.

"Fine! So are we. Ought to be a good party."

"Right. Well let me introduce you around. Then we'll show you our schedule of operations."

NORTON saw in the first seconds of the introductions that these men had been hand-picked for the job. There was something in their faces and bearing which told him that they seemed to have all been cast from the same piece of bronze; they had that look of indestructible hardness about them.

"Shall we get down to business?" Conners suggested.

Norton nodded and they gathered around the table. There were several scale maps of the region which was their goal. Conners pointed to an area on

one of the maps and said:

"This is the focal point of our drive, right?" he asked in appeal to the Murian.

"Right."

"Okay. Colonel West and twelve hundred regular cavalry men will start from Flagstaff in six hours, approximately noon. Special Indian guides will take details of thirty men each, over appointed trails until they reach," he pointed to a spot marked in red on the map, "here." Of course we broke up the battalion into groups to avoid crowding the highway, thus making it less suspicious to any prying patrol.

"The first group should reach the rendezvous at sunset and the last at about midnight. That spot is our junction point. General Sanders, being at the closest point of contact, will not leave until noon. As you see, we got these maps drawn to scale. Each group leader will have one. The final phase will begin, of course, when we make our contact with General Sanders."

"The army thinks of everything," Norton said in admiration.

"Not quite," Conners said in reminder. "We never thought of an invasion from space."

"N-no," Norton drawled. "Nor did any one else."

"Send Chief Tall Pine in," Conners commanded the orderly standing at the door.

Chief Tall Pine was a Navaho. He was dressed in faded whites. A brilliant feather protruded from a brightly colored head band. His smooth, bronze-colored features were immobile. He stood, silent, waiting for Conners' words.

"Your men have their instructions, chief?"

"Yes. We are ready to leave at any time."

Norton's brows lifted at the chief's



use of English.

"Good!" Conners said. "Then let them take the first detail."

The chief turned and without another word, left.

"Of course you and your friends will be in our party," Conners said, as he turned from Norton and stepped to a bench along the wall. He selected a hat from the rest on the bench.

His words had been a signal for departure. The other officers selected the map they needed from the pile on the table. And suddenly the room was full of small talk, the kind common the world over when a tension has been broken. One by one the others left until all that remained was Norton and his friends and Conners.

"Good men, eh?" Norton asked reflectively.

"The best!" Conners answered and snapped the switch to the room lights.

"Oh, by the way, Norton," the Colonel said as they stood on the path and waited for their mounts. "We sent out those large caliber guns, by pack animals, earlier this evening."

"Large caliber guns?" Witson asked.

"Yes," Norton explained. "Hale made up thirty of them on my order. You see, I remember that ray Jetto used. Number, I, told me that certain ships only, carry the weapon. They have distinct markings. And they must fly at a constant speed and at not too high an altitude. That night we put you to bed early, we went over to the General's quarters and our friend drew a picture in color of the ship. The men who are going to operate those guns are picked anti-aircraft specialists. They'll be clay pigeons for those boys."

Their mounts arrived at that moment breaking off the conversation. But Witson had no doubt that Norton had not forgotten a single thing which would cause the enemy trouble. Norton had

that type of mind and thoroughness. Their horses betrayed a nervousness, as if they sensed the coming struggle and realized that they were to be part of it. A shadow, which dissolved into two separate beings, an Indian and a horse, slid to a stop before them. It proved to be their guide.

They could hear all about them the varied sounds of men engaged in the acts of getting away, and co-mingled with the low-voiced commands were the sounds of horses being saddled and mounted. In an amazingly small time all was in readiness. A pregnant silence settled over the compound. Then Conners stood erect in his saddle and shouted:

"All right, boys! Let's go!"

A SINGLE concerted shout met the announcement. Then there was a vast clattering sound as hundreds of horses moved into action. Not all left by the gate through which Norton's car had come. In fact only a small part of them left that way. Among them was the group of which Conners was the head.

While Norton rode his horse up alongside the Colonel's, Witson reined in beside the Murian, who was obviously ill at ease.

"First time on a horse?" the old man asked.

The other shook his head, dumbly. He was too engrossed in the business of just staying mounted. No one had thought that he might not have any knowledge of horses. Nor had he.

"Yes," he replied to Witson's question. Then, as the horse leaped forward, following the pace set by the lead animal, he continued in jerks, "We—don't—have—animals . . . ohh!" the exclamation was wrung from him as his mount settled into a long-strided run.

"Just let him have his head," Witson called in advice, spurring his own horse alongside. "There. That's better," he continued as the other took his advice.

Their Indian guide suddenly cut off from the highway. From then on it was sage and sand. They settled down to a steady pace which ate up the miles. The sun was exactly overhead when the Indian pulled up to a halt in the lee of a narrow gully. They dismounted and the men took their rations from the saddle bags. They ate them cold. To Norton, unused to riding such as he had been through, it seemed but a moment had passed when Conners arose and looking at the watch on his wrist said:

"Time to move, men."

They were an odd lot as they wearily arose and remounted. A half dozen cowboys in the soiled jeans and Levi's which was their standard dress; two platoons of men in the speckled, khaki coveralls that were their desert uniform; three men, heavy set and placid-looking, who were deputies in peace time; and Norton and his two friends made up the Colonel's party. Only the Indian, the perfect example of the stoic, showed no strain from the ride.

Once again they were in the saddle and on their way. Once again the sand arose in dusty fountains from the horses' hoofs. And once again the land rose and fell in even waves before them. This time, though, each succeeding hill was a little higher than its neighbor. The sun descended in the brilliant flaming glow of flame which characterized it in that part of the country. The sky was like something taken from a calendar. But Norton and his friends were too weary to note its beauty.

THE night stole upon them, chill and forbidding.

Once again they rested; this time for an hour. And once again the interminable ride. This time they did not stop until dawn knocked at the peaks of the mountains into which they had come. The Murian slid from his saddle and lay inert on the ground, too spent to move. Norton flopped beside him as did Witson. One of the cowboys built a small fire and two of the cavalrymen made breakfast for the rest. It was a welcome relief from the rations they had had on their last two stops. Conners let them rest a little longer, this time. At last he rose and came over to sit beside Norton and his friends.

"About eighty miles more," he announced in a mild tone. As a matter of crossing the street.

"To where?" Norton asked.

"To where we meet the others."

"And where precisely is that?"

"Just this side of the Utah border. That's why we started at different times and why some had to take cars to get to the rendezvous. We've gone around two hundred and fifty miles, so far."

"What is it, some small town?"

"Lord, no! Although there will not be the ten thousand men we expected, there will be some odd six thousand. And that many men in a town the size of these border hamlets would be noticed from the air. No, we meet in—a valley which our friend here," he thumbed toward the Murian, "says lies some hundred miles south of our goal. More, he gave us the exact details of the spot."

Conners pulled several maps from the trouser pockets of his coveralls and spread them out for their perusal.

"See," he said, pointing to a heavily underlined section, "this is the valley. He says it is about ten miles across and half as broad. At its head is a pass which is a wasteland. Beyond the pass

is a great area of desert land, never before mapped. And here," he pointed to a dozen radiating red lines from the focal point of the waste land under discussion, "are the routes we take."

"Sounds complicated," was Norton's observation.

Conners sighed. "It is."

He arose and gave the signal to resume their ride. The rest seemed to have worked miracles. For even the Murian seemed more at ease in the saddle. Conners was right. Norton's watch showed twelve, when they reached the head of the valley.

Norton looked curiously down into the shallow floor of the valley. Never had he seen so many men on horseback. The entire floor was alive with mounted men. And more and more of the details of thirty kept riding down to join the rest. The Murian had picked an excellent spot. The valley was in effect a huge box. The entire floor was level, so that it made for easy handling of the large numbers of horsemen. Far ahead and seen through a haze, was the entrance to the pass Conners had spoken of.

Then the Indian led the way down.

Everything moved with clockwork-precision when they reached the valley floor. Two cavalymen greeted them and after inquiring as to their number, directed them toward one side.

"You'll find herders at number 2 camp site, sir," one of them said.

"Where can I find General Sanders, private?" Conners asked.

"Headquarters is just beyond that stand of trees, sir," came the answer.

Conners put the group in charge of one of the non-commissioned officers in their group and with Norton and his friends in tow made for headquarters.

The General's face was alive with good humor and his eyes crinkled in greeting.

"Welcome!" he shouted in jovial tones. "Welcome! Norton, your friend is a genius. I tell you a genius! Now if we find the rest—but pshaw! Of course we will. . . ."

"Excuse me, sir," a voice broke in.

"Yes, Lieutenant?" the General turned to the officer who had intruded into his talk.

"Colonel West has just come in," the rather young-looking officer said.

"Good! Send him in."

While they waited for the Colonel's arrival, Sanders rolled down an immense map which hung suspended from one of the canvas walls.

"Step this way, gentlemen," the General said.

They crowded close to the wall. Norton saw that the map represented the immediate vicinity of the valley and an area not more than a hundred miles on all sides, as was shown by the scale at the bottom of the map.

The tent flap parted and a short, roly-poly man came through. There was something vivacious about his way of stepping, as if he was in the midst of a dance. His features, too, were alive with an inner joy, in contrast to the rest, even the General, who in spite of his air of joviality, had a suppressed air of tightness about him.

The Colonel had a high pitched voice, in keeping with his appearance.

"Maps again, eh, Sam?" he said in familiar greeting.

"That's right. And you'd better get a good look at this one. I'm sending the first of the scouts out to get the lay of the land. As soon as they come back, the first detail will follow."

"Carry on, mon Capitaine," West said.

The General lifted a pointer from the wooden edge at the bottom of the map.

"As you will note, gentlemen," he began, "this is a map of our operational

area. According to the information given us, this area marked, A, is the goal we must attain. It's a shallow, circular valley, flat for almost all of its surface, and it's approximately twenty miles across. Precipitous bluffs surround it in its entirety.

"The numbers marked off in red, are troop disposal locations. I hope you have driven home to your junior and non-commissioned officers, the fact that they *must* memorize these locations. The signal corps will use the heliograph apparatus since we have been told that any mechanical signal devices will be detected. The attack will begin at 1700. Now, are there any questions?"

"Yes," Conners said. "Why must we wait for the scouts? Why not go in and beat hell out of them now?"

"Because we don't know whether they have arrived or not. We have reports to the effect that some of their planes have been seen. But we must have knowledge of how this Jetto is disposing his forces."

There were no other questions.

"You will find dinner waiting in the mess," the General announced. "I imagine most of you can use a hot meal."

There were no dissenting voices.

THE moon was a brilliant silver disc. Norton, lying on his stomach in the scrub grass looked down into the valley. Beside him lay the Murian. Farther off about ten yards, Witson kept Conners company. The silence was broken only by the small sounds of men seeking more comfortable positions in the tough grass and among the boulders. Norton knew that several hundreds of such group were scattered all around the rim of the valley.

Down below, the moon reflected on the shapes of a hundred cigar-shaped space ships. Fires made light the en-

tire valley floor. At the very center of the valley, a half dozen gigantic machines showed distorted, grotesque shadows along the floor. He looked at his watch. Another hour of waiting, then—he steeled his mind against the thought that they might fail.

He rolled slightly and the muzzle of the gun at his side pressed deeply into his side. He pulled it forward and then Murian turned at the sound.

"You feel pretty certain that this weapon will do the trick," he said.

"Yes!" Norton answered without hesitation. "Further, they'll never know from where we're firing, since there are no gun flashes to give us away."

The moonlight showed the wry grin on Norton's lips.

"We have a saying in this world, 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating.' It all came out so perfectly on the drawing board."

"You mean," the Murian asked incredulously, "that you haven't even performed an experiment?"

"No!"

"Oh good! Fine! A brain storm and a whole world. . . ."

"Wait, my friend," Norton said hastily. "It isn't as if I whistled in the wind. Mathematically it worked out perfectly. It should do the same in practice."

The Murian sighed aloud. "We'll see," he said.

The darkness lightened and from the east a faint streak of pale-hued rosy light showed above the edge of the far plateau. The light grew brighter, climbed higher until the sun itself peeked down at them.

Norton shaded his eyes and looked keenly toward the light. Somewhere to one side of it General Sanders and a picked body of troops lay in seclusion. He turned his eyes away and

looked below once again. Already there were the first signs of activity which proclaimed a new work day.

The thin, dry mountain air had the property of making things stand out with perfect clarity. He saw several men come from a large, low building. They were either the cooks or kitchen helpers, whose duty it was to start the fires going. Then, from another building a file of soldiers, dressed in the tight-fitting clothes of the Murians, marched forth.

A hand wrenched at his shoulder and a voice called in quick accents:

"Look! The signal!"

Norton hastily turned his glance in the direction of the other's pointing finger. A signalman was using the blinker code on the heliograph. Over and over again, the message came, "Commence firing, as per instructions."

Even as Norton pointed the odd, funnel shaped muzzle in the direction of the space shapes, he found time to tell the Murian a final direction in the use of the gun:

"The range is about a thousand yards. Set the catch at ten, aim and fire. That's all there is to it."

It was strange, and fearsome too, the absence of sound. Norton and the rest pressed the triggers of their guns and nothing seemed to happen. Yet down below, in the shallow, circular valley, terrible things were taking place.

**W**HERE the space ships had once stood, there was only emptiness now. And where the derrick shapes of the huge machines had been, only emptiness remained. Norton felt a sickness come over him when he saw what happened to those unfortunate enough to be caught in the path of the soundless waves. Whatever part of their body was struck just disappeared. So it was that he saw trunkless legs still

running in reflex action. And saw headless bodies stagger drunkenly about. Then a half dozen shadows passed slowly across the valley floor, like the distorted shapes of pre-historic birds. It puzzled him. Then the Murian shouted:

"Quick! Before they loose the ray on us!"

It was the feared air patrol.

"Conners!" Norton called hastily to the Colonel. "Get that gun going."

A half dozen men sprang from the tall grass and raced to the large caliber gun hidden between two boulders. In a few, elongated, ugly snout pointed heavenward. Norton peered upward to where the patrol ships had separated. Just as the Murian had said, they flew at a rather low level and slowly. Perfect targets. Yet when the gunners released their silent blasts at them, they continued in flight. Something was wrong. And that something had to be righted. Soon! For already some of the planes had let go their cargoes of madness on those below. Norton saw men on the far side of the rim in the first stages of madness. Soon all would come under the influence of the ray.

"Blast them!" the Murian shouted, leaping to his feet. "They're impregnable to sound. And that's what your weapon is, isn't it?"

Norton nodded, too overcome with horror to speak.

"Call Conners, quick!"

The Colonel dashed over as if the devil was at his heels.

"Tell the General to attack," the Murian said. "And quickly, before it's too late."

"You mean have the men go down there?" Conners asked incredulously.

"Yes! Yes!" the other answered with impatience.

The emergency of the moment was too great to permit detailed explana-



tions. Conners did as he was told. And even as he gave instructions to the signalman attached to their outfit, the Murian began a headlong, reckless race to reach the bottom. Hard at his heels, Norton and Witson followed in close pursuit. They reached the flat and as they pelted onward after the Murian, they heard the pursuing footsteps of the soldiery.

Norton hadn't noticed it, but directly below them was a shed of some sort. It was evident that the Murian was making for it. And that there were those within it who were just as evidently intent on seeing to it that he didn't. For from several apertures in the walls, flashes of light blossomed. And the ground all around the running man suddenly darkened as the flame scorched the earth.

Worse, now Norton and the rest came into the open at the mercy of those hidden within. Nor did they waste time leveling their volleys at them.

The Murian skidded to a halt, and fell flat on his face. For a second, Norton thought he had been hit. Then he saw the other lift the gun he still carried to his shoulder and press the trigger. And where a second before there had been a shed, there was nothing. The miracle of sound, high beyond the power of the ear to get, had disintegrated it.

Conners panted to a stop beside the prone body of the Murian.

"The General wants to know what to do now?" he asked breathlessly.

The Murian rose slowly. He looked about and saw that the signalman was waiting only a few feet away, his mirror-like heliograph in readiness. He pointed to a pear-shaped building a half mile off, set in the edge of a particularly perpendicular section of the cliff, and said:

"Our weapons will have no effect,

either on the building or the destroyer ships. They are impregnable to sound. So there is but one thing to do. Take that building . . . by direct attack!"

"That would be suicidal," Conners said in horror.

"Better death that way, than . . ." the Murian pointed to the rim of the cliff. And they got his meaning. The ray had now begun to show the harvest it had sowed. A gigantic battle seemed to be in progress up there. They saw men in savage hand to hand combat. And above them, the ships moved in languid, graceful flight, sowing the seeds of madness.

CONNERS turned without another word and signalled to the waiting signalman. Immediately, the flashes went forth giving the do or die command of the Murian.

Not all of the men had stayed above. Great numbers of them had come below. With and without leaders, they came forward to get into close quarters with the enemy.

It was an even battle until the Murians realized that the Earthmen's guns were more than a match for their own blast pistols. Then at a command from someone in the pear-shaped, metallic affair those in the open retreated to the safety of the sound-proof barracks. Once inside, they turned their weapons on their adversaries with terrible effect.

All this time, Norton and the others were making at full speed for the shelter of a large steel dormitory. Someone was waving a white shirt from one of the windows. They piled into the structure, guns at the ready. There wasn't anything to be afraid of. Only an immense room, stretching for a full hundred yards, divided into halves, barren except for bunks on either side: there was no other thing in the room. Nothing but a handful of the most

wretched humans they had ever seen. They were gathered in a huddle in the near corner of the room, their eyes looking toward them with the frightened looks of those in too great a misery to do anything else.

"You!" Norton called to one of them, the least wretched of the lot. "Any more of you here?"

The man could only shake his head in dumb misery.

"Never mind them," the Murian said. "Let's get to Jetto. Blast it! I didn't think he'd bring a 'Duro' house with him."

"Duro house?" Norton asked.

"Yes. Impervious to anything but molecular dissolution. That's why your weapon has no effect on it. And since we're in the comparative shelter of this place, let's plan our course."

"Right!" Conners said. "What do you think we ought to do?"

"First take a look at the situation from the other end of this building."

The Murian started at a trot for the far end, the rest following close at his heels. He peered cautiously through one of the windows. Norton stood at his shoulder and followed his example. The wide stretch of ground before them was alive with men, some in the varied dress of the attackers, others in the outlandish dress of the Murians, and all engaged in a struggle to the death.

When a man was struck by the lightning bolt that was shot from one of the blast pistols, he became on the instant, a charred hulk, crisply stiff and black as pitch. The Murians simply disappeared when they came within range of the sound blast.

Not all of the Murians had reached the safety of the Duro house. Norton asked that as they pressed their noses against the window pane.

"It wasn't meant to house all of us," the Murian explained. "See. It's

only about sixty feet high and about the same in diameter. He's probably got his personal guard and all of his council in the building with him. "Norton!" he suddenly yelled.

"Huh?" Norton stepped away from the other and looked at him as if he thought the other had gone mad.

"Look! A Duro freighter! If we can reach it, I've got a terrific idea."

Norton looked in the direction of the Murian's pointing finger. An immense space ship stood in solitary grandeur where once there had been some twenty of the other ships. It was quite the largest plane Norton had ever seen. He imagined it was capable of holding a thousand men.

"Okay, pal," Norton said as he opened the door. "Let's go!"

And once again the mad race began, this time for the freighter which was to be the solution of their whole problem. As though the men in the Duro house realized what their intention was, a terrific barrage was laid down in front of them. Since they had to pass the Duro house before they could reach the freighter, they had to get past the zone of fire. The Murian who was in the lead threw up his hand and brought them to a halt.

"No use," he panted. "They've got us."

And then a horde of screaming men cascaded down from the hillside behind the pear-shaped house. At their head was the roly-poly Colonel West. It was as if they had gone mad. They spilled around the house, running at full speed and firing their guns into every sight opening they could see. It was a mad thing they were doing. And an utterly hopeless thing. For those within simply blazed away at them in security.

THE toll the Murians took was frightful. But it did what was the

only thing that permitted Norton and his friends to continue. It kept those within busy fighting off the new danger. So it was that Norton and the rest reached the Duro freighter in a less hazardous manner than they thought.

The Murian made straight for the hatchway leading to the pilot's cabin in the nose of the ship. Norton had time only to observe that the inside of the ship was as large as a good sized battleship, and that it was deserted. Then the Murian was running full speed down a long runway in the center. About a third of the way down he turned down a corridor and stopped before a door.

"If only the automatic motor is in operation," he muttered as he pressed at a button in the wall next to the elevator door.

It was. The door opened from the center in two sections. And confronting them was one of the largest elevators Norton had ever seen. Low expressions of amazement fell from the lips of the soldiers who crowded on after Norton and his friends.

The Murian pressed at another button, the outside doors swung closed and almost immediately they were at the topmost level. The doors came open and they found themselves in an elaborate cabin, empty of humans.

The Murian wasn't interested in what he saw there. His gaze was riveted on another door. He walked to this one, slowly. And Norton saw his lips press tight against each other as he punched at the button beside the door. When the door opened, Norton was sure that the other muttered some sort of prayer of thankfulness. Because what he said was:

"One chance in a thousand that they didn't think to close this door. Now we really have the chance to win."

But he didn't go through it. In-

stead, he turned and went over to the wide pilot's seat. Whirling it around, he addressed the rest of them, saying:

"Well, men. We come to the time for a most important decision to be made. And it's all up to you."

They looked at him, puzzled by his manner.

"You see, it boils down to a question of choice. This ship carries a smaller one, a fighter ship, the fastest thing in the universe. Above us, as you know, are six such planes. You have the choice of sending me aloft in an attempt to destroy these planes. If I succeed, then all is well, for then I can destroy the Duro house and all who are within it. But if I fail, then Jetto or whoever has observed us, will communicate the news to those who survive. There are weapons on those destroyer craft which will disintegrate this freighter.

"The alternative is this. Man the weapons on the topside; fight off whoever attacks from above, while some man the stern guns against those in the house. It might be a slow death one way and a fast one the other. But death in any eventuality. If I succeed, then all is saved. I leave it to you."

For a moment there was utter silence while the men looked at each other. Nothing was said. Yet somehow they saw in each other's eyes, the same answer.

It was Connors who gave the answer:

"Take the fighter up. Just show us those guns you were talking about."

Five minutes later, the Murian stepped before the open door. Each of the men there had shaken him solemnly by the hand in farewell. Then Norton stepped forward.

"Y'know, my friend," he said as he clasped the other's hand. "I sort of envy you. Y'see, I too like to get in there and punch away as long as I'm

able. And if the odds are against me, so what. I'd sure like to be up there with you, fella."

THE other looked keenly into the lined and still bruised features, swept upward to the torn scalp, and peered deep within the smiling eyes of Norton. An answering smile came to his own eyes.

"There's no reason why you can't," he said. "There's a gunner's seat in the cabin, you know."

"You mean. . . ."

"Come on, then. We've an appointment with destiny."

Norton watched with fascinated glance as the Murian's hands worked at the rather simple arrangement on the dashboard. It was far less complicated an affair than any he had ever seen. The markings were foreign to him, but he could almost guess what the symbols were. When the Murian pressed the first, home, a distinct humming sound was heard. The second started the slim, torpedo shape along the greased skidway on which it rested. The third was on a lever which the pilot did not use until they were through the hatchway, which the Murian had opened before they stepped into the ship.

While all this was going on, the Murian gave Norton his instructions:

"We'll have the element of surprise with us. For even if they spot us, it won't occur to them that we are enemies, unless Jetto warns them. Of course we will also hear that warning."

His words sort of trailed off at the end.

" . . . Let's hope that they're too busy in the Duro house to notice us."

Norton looked through the glass in front of him and saw that they were in the air. The Murian was making altitude slowly. Norton guessed that by so doing he wouldn't arouse the

suspicious of the others.

"Do you remember how you operated the gun aboard the other ship?" the Murian asked.

"Yes."

"Well, there's a similar button down below the level where your right hand is. See it?"

"Yep."

"Now I'm going to be too busy operating this ship to have time to fire the guns in my side," the Murian said. "That button operates two guns simultaneously, one in the nose and the other slanted forward from the port-side. Keep your finger lax on the button and your eyes glued to the glass in front of you. When you see the crosswires in the center of the glass glow red, press the button in."

Norton nodded his head in understanding. And did as he was told. He had thought the glass panel at the level of his eyes was a mirror. Now he saw that it didn't send back the reflection of his face. Yet he couldn't see through it.

A voice suddenly blared:

"Ware fighter ship coming in! Beware fighter. . . ."

And the Murian went into action. The lever which had been only part of the way in was thrust in for its full length. Norton was shoved back hard against his seat, as the ship's nose was pointed skyward. He threw a hurried glance through the glass of the cabin and saw that the black of outer space surrounded them. Then the ship's nose pointed straight to earth and the Murian's voice came to him in soft warning:

"Watch the glass! We're going in!"

COLONEL CONNERS and Witson watched the small, streamlined ship take off. In each heart was a prayer for the success of their under-

taking. They could see through the wide-curving glass of the cabin the whole panorama of the sky above them. The six destroyers still sailed above in lazy circles. Norton's ship took a course which passed them by a good distance. Suddenly the two watchers went tense, pressed their faces close to the glass.

They had seen the six craft suddenly split up the formation they were in. And saw too that Norton's ship had inexplicably disappeared from view. Witson guessed, correctly, what had happened.

"Those ships. They've been warned."

Then, as though it came from nothingness, Norton's ship plummeted earthward into their vision again. Its nose was pointed straight down as if it was going to plunge itself into the earth. At the last second and as though by a miracle, it straightened out and flew right in between two ships flying side by side. They saw a burst of flame shoot from the nose and side of Norton's ship and one of the two ships became an incandescent ball. It fell in slow spirals toward the ground. But before it could land, there was terrific report, heard within the walls of the freighter and the destroyer craft disappeared into a thousand bits of flaming wreckage.

A tight grin of satisfaction spread Norton's lips, as he watched the plane he had shot down, disintegrate. And a hundred screaming devils were let loose inside the cabin. The sister ship to the one they had shot down had caught them in their sights for the barest instant. They hadn't been hit, but the flame had burst just before their nose and the concussion rocked the staunch little craft from stern to stern.

The Murian twisted desperately at the wheel with one hand while the other pushed at the speed lever. The ship stood on its end, literally and the

larger destroyer swept by. The hair lines glowed red in that second and Norton pressed hard at the button. Once again there was that awesome sound of metal being torn asunder, of flame striking the combustibles which made up the other's armament. He caught a momentary glimpse of the flaming coffin that was the other ship as it slid past them.

"Two," Norton counted softly. "And four to go."

Now the air all around them fairly crackled as the flame bursts from the other four ships struck closer and closer to home. The pilots of those ships had evidently decided that in single plane combat Norton's friend was far the superior. Then better to sacrifice one or two and get him by ganging up on him. The odds were all in their favor.

A weird and thrilling chase began then. For the Murian was quick to get their intentions. He was also quick to realize that in that case he stood little chance of escaping. So he put the throttle all the way in and let them chase him all over the sky.

First they sped high into outer space, then they dipped downward in a weaving serpentine pace toward the earth. And all the while the Murian watched in grim fascination through the glass before him, to see that they did not out-guess him.

"I think they've got us," he said after a few moments. "The engines can only manufacture enough fuel for a limited time. That's why the freighter carried this plane. And the ones chasing us are larger, have greater capacities."

"You mean this is the end?" Norton asked.

"Could very well be."

"Then the hell with them! Let's go in and knock off as many as we can, before we go out!"

"No!" the Murian said softly. "We



have a chance. A slim one. If your friends only catch on to what I'm going to do?"

Norton gave the other a puzzled look.

"Might as well shove over," the Murian suggested. "There won't be any need of the guns now."

"You see," the Murian went on when Norton moved close to him. "This is a faster ship than the others. I'm going to level it off about a hundred yards above the ground. And I'm going to fly back and forth above the freighter."

"I get it!" Norton said excitedly. "If they've got anyone manning the topside guns in the freighter, the ships coming in behind us will be easy marks."

"If they've got anyone manning those guns," the Murian reminded him softly.

CONNERS and Witson watched the enthralling drama taking place above them. They broke into spontaneous cries of delight when they saw the second ship burst into flames. Then their delighted cries changed to ones of horror and warning when they saw the flight of four come down on them from above. It seemed the most miraculous sort of maneuvering, the way the smaller ship evaded the clumsy approaches of the others.

Suddenly the smaller ship did the narrowest inside loop Conners had ever seen and streaked, almost at tree-top level toward them. In the smallest perceptible time the ship with Norton and the Murian passed overhead. And close behind, the four pursuing ships streaked after them.

Again a loop, this one an outside loop, and the pursued and the pursuers passed overhead. And once again.

"What the hell's that fool tryin' to do?" Witson grunted.

"Don't *know*," the Colonel said wor-

riedly. "But there must be a reason other than one of escape. I'd say their plane was way beyond the others' speed."

Once again the chase passed above and at such a low altitude, that Witson exclaimed:

"Dammit! What's he trying to do, ram this thing?"

"H'm," Conners said in a speculative tone. "They're flying so low that it seems like I could reach out and . . . holy smoke! Witson! I know why they're doing that!"

"Huh?"

"Don't you remember? The Murian told us about the guns on the upper deck and to use them in a pinch. That's why he's flying so low! And directly over our heads. He wants us to knock the others out of the sky."

The other looked at him blank-eyed. But Conners wasn't speculating any more. His thought spurred him into action. Whirling from the window, he made at full speed for the top deck, where the rest of the crew had gone. Norton had suggested that they man the guns up there just in case he and the Murian didn't succeed in their attempt to destroy the other ships.

Among the twenty odd men were some who had belonged to a crack anti-aircraft outfit. And the last thing the Murian had done was to explain the mechanics of operating the guns.

"You men!" Conners shouted as he raced down the stretch of metal catwalk toward them. "Man those guns! Quick!"

Their faces betrayed the wonder they felt at his excitement. But they leaped to the guns in automatic obedience.

The entire roof of the freighter was made of some material which had the property of glass in that it could be seen through. The long muzzles of the guns protruded through the ports set

in the material. They could see the planes in the distance start on another lap of the chase. It would be a matter of seconds, then they would be overhead and past.

"The lead one's ours," Conners warned. "Get the others."

Like automatons the men moved to adjust the sights and set the automatic calculators. The whole thing took a few seconds. Just long enough so that they were through by the time the first ship went by. Then the others followed. And twin flashes of flame leaped from the muzzles of the guns.

And then there was only a single plane following the other.

The Murian spun the ship about. And Norton saw what had happened. An involuntary cheer came to his lips. But when he returned his glance to the Murian, he saw that the other's face bore a look of intense worry.

"Something wrong?" he asked quickly.

"Fuel's about run dry," the Murian said quietly.

"You mean . . . this is the pay-off?"

The Murian was silent. In his eyes, however, was that which told Norton that the man had come to some momentous decision.

"You're not afraid to die, are you?" the Murian asked.

Norton looked through the glass and saw that the other plane was coming toward them at blinding speed.

"No," he answered shortly.

"Then make your peace," the Murian suggested. "What I'm going to do . . . well, it will be suicidal."

Norton nodded gravely.

"Hang on then," the other said. And pressed the speed lever all the way in.

The ship responded instantly. Norton watched in helpless horror, as the Murian whirled their plane through the sky. And realized that they were los-

ing speed. He knew the Murian was aware of that fact also. He could only wait and wonder at what his companion had in mind.

Now they were going so slowly that the pursuing ship overshot theirs. The other turned back, went up a few hundred yards, so as to get the proper altitude, then screamed down in a power dive. And the Murian turned the nose of their ship up to meet the enemy!

NORTON'S mouth opened in an involuntary shout. But the sound died before he could utter it. He saw the cold look of utter indifference on the Murian's face as he set his plane into the path of destruction. Then Norton looked up and saw the terror-stricken countenance of the pilot of the oncoming plane. Saw the man make a last, frenzied move to escape his doom. He almost succeeded. At the last second, the other ship skidded from their path. But not quite far enough. They struck and rammed half-way into the belly of the larger ship. And a whirling, flame-drenched mass twisted lazily earthward.

A vast blinding light swept the vision from Norton's eyes. First, thunder had boomed in the cabin, then the light. He became a match caught in a whirlwind. The column of metal to which his chair was attached, broke off at the base. His unconscious body swept forward against the strap and broke it as if it were a piece of string. Somehow, he was sent skidding along the floor and in between two supporting beams. And there his body lodged, while the entwined shapes fell to earth.

The flaming wreckage struck the ground in a final burst of flame. And immediately fell to bits, the torn and burning bits scattering far and wide. And one of those bits of wreckage was the cabin in which Norton and his friend had been entombed.

"Nor-ton. Nor-ton."

He heard his name called, the voice seeming to come from a long distance. Stiffly, his head turned to the sound. He opened his eyes and was surprised that he could see.

"Nor-ton. Nor-ton."

Again the voice came, this time in weaker accents.

Norton rolled over onto his belly. Slowly, one knee came up, then the other. He rested in that position for an instant. Then he placed his hands, knuckles down to the ground and brought his legs up to a crouching position. And straightened upright.

He looked about him with pain-clouded vision. A few feet away was the twisted shape of something which had once been a human figure. Now it was like a rag doll, torn by the hands of a willful child. The sound he had heard came from the doll-shape.

"Nor-ton."

He forced his legs to move, although he could not feel anything. The doll-shape kept fading from view and returning, like a mirage seen through delirium filled eyes. The voice too, was now near, now distant. But something commanded him to move to the horror which was there.

He stood above the torn and grotesquely twisted shape of the Murian. Or rather he swayed in a kind of drugged stupor. But now his eyes were clear. He wished they weren't. It was not right that man should see another man who was alive and looked like the Murian. For the Murian was alive!

It was incredible.

His completely nude body looked as if a thousand knives had been put to work on him. His right arm hung by a sliver of bone and torn flesh, to his armpit. Something had gouged out his left eye and the socket, bloody and oozing slime, had an air of raffish ri-

baldry. A whole section of skin had been torn away from the jawbone exposing the gums all the way to where they ended below the ear. Only there was no ear.

And this travesty of life lived!

Norton dropped to one knee beside it. The sounds it was making were barely discernible.

"Nor-ton! Nor-ton!"

"Yes," Norton breathed huskily.

The twisted body on the ground writhed in torturing pain. A high, keening sound came from the torn mouth. Norton's flesh crawled as the sound tore through his very vitals. Then he said:

"It's Norton. I'm here, beside you."

HE COULDN'T understand how that mouth, those hideous lips could conceive and give event to articulate sounds. Yet in an instant, in answer to his words, the Murian's good eye opened and focused in a terrible, concentrated look on Norton's face.

"Dy-ing. Dy-ing," the voice whispered. "Got to—to do—something. My boy—in there." The voice became a shriek! A terrible, pain-filled cry for the right to live a little while longer. "Got to—get him!"

"Easy man," Norton commanded. Gently, his hand came down and pressed the other, who had by some means of sheer will power, risen half way erect, back to the ground.

The Murian was too weak to struggle. Already the thread of life was unraveling at a pace too swift for repair. Norton realized it as well as the other.

Once again the man on the ground displayed that tremendous and awe-inspiring will.

"Norton," he said, and his voice was strangely alive, "promise me—that you'll try to get to the boy. Don't let anything happen to him. Don't . . .

let . . . *anyth.* . . ."

There was no more—of man or words.

Norton stumbled erect once again. He brushed the hot wetness from his eyes. Across the rubble strewn ground a group of men came running in his direction. In the lead was the slender, but no longer dapper figure of Colonel Conners. And behind him a few feet was Witson.

They were a tight-lipped, vengeful group around the body of the dead Murian.

"My God!" Witson burst out. "We didn't expect to see either of you alive."

"Guess I'm too tough to die," Norton said. "Got caught between two support beams and I guess they absorbed the shock of the fall. He lived for a short while. And now we have, or rather I have, a promise to keep."

He told them the Murian's last words.

"It's our promise, too," Conners said.

There was no need for questions. As one, the group turned and followed the two men in the lead. Their steps were set in the direction of the Duro house, gleaming in the light of the midday sun. They saw, when they came within a hundred yards of it that it was completely surrounded by the General's men. The dead and the not-dead. It was an almost even division. Jetto and his crew were exacting a fearful payment.

Norton brought them to a halt. A plan had formed in his brain, a plan which had to do with the undoing of Jetto.

"Conners," his voice was terse. "Get to the General and have him order a retreat."

"Are you nuts?" said Conners in horror.

"Do as I say," Norton demanded.

The heat rose in Conners' face at

the preemptory command. His throat worked. Words, angry ones, bubbled on his lips. And Witson spilled oil on the troubled waters.

"Softly, gentlemen. No time for quarrels. I think Norton has something in mind, Conners. Am I right, Dale?" Witson said.

"You are," Norton said tersely. "Get to the General and have him do as I suggested. Then bring him to me and I'll explain."

Conners went in person. Soon the signal mirrors flashed their messages to all parts of the battleground. And weary, battle-grimed men lifted their tired bodies from the earth, and moved to the rear. The flashes from the pear-shaped house continued to follow until the last of them was out of range. The dead looked like petrified, blackened sections of trees.

"Well, Norton," Sanders asked. "What's on your mind?"

"Just this, General. I know how we can beat them. And I think it's going to be the only way. Because it's obvious that Jetto and his pals have thought about every possibility or rather every probability in their defense. Including that of having to fight at night."

"You're not saying anything, so far, Norton. It was my thought that we might be able to starve them into submission."

"If they wait to be starved. But they won't! This Jetto lad, is one smart cookie. He's thought of the same thing. And going that presumption one better I'd say that he also has a way out. I think I know what he has in mind.

"That freighter out there! He can get all of his men into it. And what's to prevent us from stopping him. Once he's in there, well, he's gone. And he'll be back. When he comes the second

time, he'll make sure that he won't fail then."

"Wait a second!" Sanders objected.

"We can stop that. These guns of yours have a longer range than any of his. We can blanket the ground from the house to the freighter with our fire. Hell! Let 'em run the gauntlet. I hope they try what you think."

"Something, and all I can say is that it's intuition, tells me that our idea isn't going to pan out. So I'm offering an alternative. Give me fifty men. And let me do it my way—in conjunction with yours."

"We'll. All right. Mind telling me what it's all about?"

Norton had in mind to tell from the very beginning. A certain stubbornness in his makeup changed his mind. Instead, he said:

"Men! I want fifty volunteers. And remember, we don't have a chance if we're caught."

It looked like every man there threw his hand upward. Norton picked them at random. Conners and the jovial West were among them. Motioning with his head for them to follow, Norton started for the steep-sided valley wall.

"Ugh!" West repressed a shudder of repugnance with an effort. They had come across the first of those who had been caught in the maddening rays. To Witson and Norton the distorted, naked bodies were a familiar, but still horrible sight. But to the rest of the men, who, because they lived on the west coast, had the good fortune to have been missed, they were the most terrifying things they had ever seen. Many of them had been a little skeptical of the stories they had heard.

"That's why we've got to succeed," Norton said.

A QUARTER-MILE from the edge of the cliff was a small, wooded

section of land. It was within the security of the trees it contained that they had tethered their horses. Norton said:

"Before I tell you what's on my mind, does anyone have any idea how long it would take to reach the overhang of rock above the freighter?"

Conners' eyes narrowed in speculation. "H'm," he said slowly. "I'd say . . . about twenty miles."

"Three hours, on horseback?" Norton asked.

"About."

"Good!" Norton said. "Here's my angle. In about three hours, it'll get dark. Dark enough, at least, to hide our movements, in case any of those in the house should be curious about our disappearance. I noticed that there were any number of cowboys among those who made up some of the party. And, I suppose from habit, they brought their lariats along. There's a sixty or seventy foot drop from the top of the cliff to the roof of the freighter. And if any of you remember, the door from which we flew the small plane is still open."

For the first time, Conners displayed enthusiasm.

"I get it!" he shouted. "We use the lariats as ladders. Get into the freighter and hide. Then when that gang reach it . . ."

"We've got the jump on them!" Norton completed what Conners was about to say.

"So what are we waiting for?" West queried.

The sun was setting when they arrived on the narrow strip of ground which fronted the lip of the overhang. The sky was a blaze of color such as Norton had never seen. It was as if the Universe itself was giving them, in the display of its awe-inspiring beauty, a benediction and a blessing.



They slipped from their horses and inched their way forward to the edge of the cliff. Below, the whole of the valley was to be seen. A thin, far-spread circle of men, lay on the valley floor. Sanders' men, waiting for the sun to set. The Duro house seemed emptied of life. But they knew it was an illusion which would be dispelled at the slightest movement from those encircling it.

The flashing, scintillating colors faded into the blue-black of night. And fifty men retreated from the edge and went back to their mounts. A dozen lariats were taken from the pommels of as many horses. Two of the lariats were tied together to make a continuous rope, a hundred feet long. Then they made two of these ropes fast to each horn on the saddle. So that in the end, there were three horses having two sets of the rope ladders. And once more they made their way to the edge of the cliff.

The darkness below seemed impenetrable. There was no moon. With a suddenness that took their breaths away, a half dozen lights stabbed forth from the pear-shaped house. At first they were broad beams of white light. Then the beams broadened until they covered the entire valley floor with their glow. It was the strangest thing. They could see the upper half of the Duro house. But from where the lights began, nothing was to be seen, below them.

"Imagine," Norton said in tones of awe, "what it's like looking into that glow. I knew Jetto had something up his sleeve. Why—he's got Sanders stumped! Sanders' men can only fire blindly into the direction of the house."

"Best get started, then, Dale," Witson said in reminder.

THREE men were delegated to stand by the horses to see to it that they

didn't move during the ticklish business of the descent. One by one, they began the slow climb downward into the darkness at the edge of the huge shape below. Norton, West and Conners led the way, each down the respective rope he had chosen.

It was an odd thing, that the blinding glare of the lights ended at the very edge of the freighter. And a lucky thing, also. For when Norton and the rest reached bottom, they could not see into that whiteness. They waited in silent impatience for the last to slide down. Then, when they had all assembled, Norton led them around to where the door in the belly of the freighter still was open. Like ghosts, they stole within the semi-dark confines.

The center door was closed, just as it had been when they left. And the lights were still on in the center corridor.

"A dozen of you men take positions flanking the door," Norton said. "And you, sergeant," to one of the non-commissioned men, "close that switch. When you hear them enter, wait for all of them to come through, then snap it on! And let them have it!"

"What about us, Dale?" Witson asked.

"They've got to come up this main corridor to get to the pilot's cabin," he said in answer. "See those ports set in the wall alongside. One of us will keep watch. When the lights go on, we'll come charging out, shooting as we come. From then on, it'll be every man for himself."

"Suits me," West said almost gayly, as if it was the very thing he had been waiting for.

They moved to their designated spots with a stealth which in any other circumstances would have been almost funny. For as yet there wasn't any-

thing to have made them careful. Yet that is the nature of men engaged in a hazardous undertaking. Silence and stealth walk hand in hand.

The pilot's cabin was in darkness. Witson moved immediately to one of the ports. Norton, the last through the door, had left it open a few inches. Enough so there wouldn't be any time lost in getting through when the attack came. The main corridor was now in complete darkness.

They hadn't long to wait.

It came so suddenly in fact that it took them by surprise. One second there was darkness. The next, there was bright lights and explosive sounds.

"Here they come!" Witson shouted.

Norton flung the door wide and with yelling throats, the men leaped through. The sergeant had done his work well. He had waited until the door had closed on the last of the Murians, before turning on the lights. The surprise was complete. But only for an instant.

For the first time there was hand to hand battle. For one of the Murians had rapped out, even as some had started to use the blast guns:

"No! Too close for them!"

The same thing held for the Earthmen. Several had let go with their weapons and were horrified to see that not only were the Murians in the path of the sound destroyed, but those who were beyond them also.

Norton recognized the situation for its worth. And felt a glow of satisfaction. At long last, he was going to feel that he had the tangible in his grasp.

They were almost evenly matched in manpower. Perhaps there were ten or so more of the Murians. It was as if madness possessed them. Forgotten were the weapons they bore. Each in his own way, by the strength of his arms, tried to tear the breath from the throats of his enemy. And where the

arms weren't enough, then teeth and knees were brought to use.

It was man against man.

**N**O, IT was animal against animal.

For the sounds which came from their throats were not those of humans. Guttural, bestial, their voices filled the corridor with inhuman sounds.

The men behind Norton, under the leadership of the two Colonels, fell into an instinctive military pattern. Both West and Conners had seen that confusion was the result of their strategem in ambushing the Murians. So they let Norton and several of the others charge in headlong attack. But they held the rest of the men back until they saw which way would be the best to attack. Then they came in in two columns, splitting the ranks of the Murians.

Norton leaped into the fray with a great bellow of delight. Ever loving a fight, he was not the one to ask the odds. Or inquire as to the chance for survival.

A lithe warrior, whose face was alight with the flame of anger, was the first to meet the pile-driving fists of the Earthman. Norton's fists pounded a quick tattoo against his chin and jaw, sending the other reeling. Norton leered and followed up. And the Murian brought his hand up in a blow, which had Norton not parried, would have meant death. For the other had pulled a knife from his belt. Norton took the hand captive for an instant, and twisted viciously. The knife clattered to the floor. Then he whirled the Murian around and clamped a full Nelson on him. There was an instant's strain and the Murian went limp. But first there had been the cracking sound of bone breaking.

He released him in time to meet the challenge of three who came charging

in to the rescue of their comrade. There was no time for fancy fist work. It was hit and duck, hit and duck. But there were three. And he had to make his blows count. One went down, quickly. But the others came in for more. And before he could twist away from their arms, they had him, one around his waist and the other from behind.

The one in front had buried his head against Norton's chest, so that it would be out of the way of the terrible fists. Norton tried to twist away from them. But they clung to him with the tenacity of leeches. More, the one behind had somehow managed to grab one of Norton's arms. Slowly, he brought that arm back in an armlock high on Norton's back.

And Norton resorted to a strategy he had once been taught. He went completely lax. And the inexorable pressure was no longer there. The Murian thought that Norton had stopped struggling. It was too late for him to do anything, when Norton brought his leg back and kicked with his booted foot. It struck against the other's shin with a loud report. And the Murian released his grip.

Norton instantly brought his freed arm around to grab the one in front of him. But the Murian suddenly shot his head upward. Norton felt the shock of the blow, and felt a wave of darkness swim before his eyes. He staggered backward from the blow. Instinctively he brought his hands up before his face. Luckily! For they brushed aside the knife from his heart. Instead, it raked a long shallow course across his chest. It also brought him from the unconsciousness he might have fallen into.

**E**VEN before full vision came to him, he acted. His right knee came up

to meet the threat of the man coming in to follow the advantage he had. It caught the other full in the groin. The Murian collapsed to the ground with a low groan of pain. And Norton drew back his leg and kicked him as hard as he could in the throat. He didn't have to look to see the consequences of the blow. The Murian was as dead as he'd ever be.

A voice, panic-filled shrieked:

"Look!"

And the battle ceased for a second.

Norton too, looked to where the others were fascinatedly staring. A Murian had somehow escaped from the fray and had made his way to the door of the pilot's cabin. He stood there for an instant. And they saw that he had his blast gun leveled at them.

It was Jetto.

"Ha!" he crowed. "Now you are all in my power. Damn you," he shrieked. "None of you will live, d'you hear? All of you!"

And he brought his deadly weapon to bear on them.

With his first words, it was as if Norton had divined what was in his mind. And even as Jetto leveled his weapon toward them Norton stooped in a lightning-like gesture and had plucked the knife from the Murian's dead fingers and had hurled it with the same motion.

There was a silver streak which flashed across the room and ended dramatically in a fleshy plop. Jetto's hands tore in a reflexive, prehensile movement at his throat. Then, as he tore the dagger free, the blood gushed forth in a crimson stream and Jetto sank slowly to his knees. He rested there for a second, while all the rest, friend and foe alike watched in fascination and suddenly he went limp and fell upon his face.

Then Norton leaped before the rest

and shouted:

"Wait!"

They turned wondering faces in his direction.

He had a purpose, however for his odd behavior. He had remembered the man, called Fu-ta. Remembered, too, that he had been opposed to what Jetto had in mind.

"Is Fu-ta among you?" he asked.

The figure of the Murian stepped forth from among the rest.

"What is it, Earthman?" he asked.

"There is no need for this," Norton said simply.

"No, you are right," the other said in agreement.

"Your leader is dead," Norton continued. "That which you came to do can no longer be done. It is useless to fight. Give up or die."

"And if we do, what then?" the Murian asked.

"I promise justice," Norton said solemnly.

The Murian turned and swept his gaze over the men of his race who were left. It was a pitiful handful. Slowly he brought his glance back to Norton.

"We are yours, to do with as you wish," he said simply.

"Lay down your arms," Norton commanded.

It was done. Swiftly, they were made prisoner. And the center door swung open and an avalanche of men poured through. At their head was

Sanders.

"I see," the General said, "that you have the situation under control."

"Except for one thing," Norton said, turning to Fu-ta once again. "Where is the boy?" he asked.

"The boy?" the Murian asked, puzzlement in his voice. Then the light broke. "Prime Number I's son, you mean?"

Norton nodded.

A gentle smile played around the Murian's lips.

"He is safe," he said. "Jetto was going to kill him when his father betrayed us. But I hid him. In the excitement of the battle, he was forgotten. And when Jetto gave orders to come here, I left him in the Duro house. You will find him there."

\* \* \*

The August night was brilliant with stars which were so bright they seemed alive. A shower of shooting stars fell across their vision. And the boy paused and asked:

"Look daddy! Shooting stars! Where do they come from?"

Norton looked down at the tousled head and sparkling eyes and felt a sadness take hold of him.

"They come," he began and stopped. He remembered another night. And it seemed to him, another life. "They come, my son," he continued, "from nowhere. And they never return."

THE END.



## WINGED GUIDES



THE charts and instruments which every ship carries to guide it safely on its journey across the seas, are very complicated and numerous. Modern men marvel at what their ancient brethren were able to accomplish without the aid of even a compass. Before the advent of even the simplest navigating instruments, sailors were entirely dependent upon the stars to guide them on their watery journey. But when the nights were cloudy and the stars were completely hidden, certain birds could be counted on to come

to the rescue and help set the prow of the vessel in the direction of land. Birds, such as crows, which have a well-developed sense of locality, were part of every vessel's standard equipment. From time to time they would be released, and the man at the wheel would follow their expert guidance.

In the ninth century, when the Vikings sailed from Norway, they kept birds on board which were set free at regular intervals. With their aid these men from the North discovered Iceland.

# The HOUSE

by  
**ROG PHILLIPS**



They stood there, silently staring at the ruins of the once proud mansion. Only it seemed as if there was something else—a misty shape slowly rising . . .



THERE was a speck of blood on Mary's lower lip where she had bitten it, trying to hold herself in. I noticed it while I kept my eyes on the road. And I groaned inwardly. It would be nip and tuck now whether we could make it to the next town before the baby came.

The highway took a sudden dip and then turned sharply. A difficult road after dark. Blacktop, just wide enough for two cars to pass each other, and with no center line to get your bearings from. The edge blended into the shoulder so that it took real concentration to keep out of the ditch.

The headlights didn't help much. The road ate up the light instead of throwing it back.

Mary swayed back and forth, and groaned. The pains were coming faster now. I cursed myself for a fool. I had thought we could make it back home before the baby came; and home was still two hundred miles away. We'd never make it.

I glanced up at the sky. The black

storm clouds had blotted out all the stars now. Any minute the storm would break. Just another thing to add to our troubles.

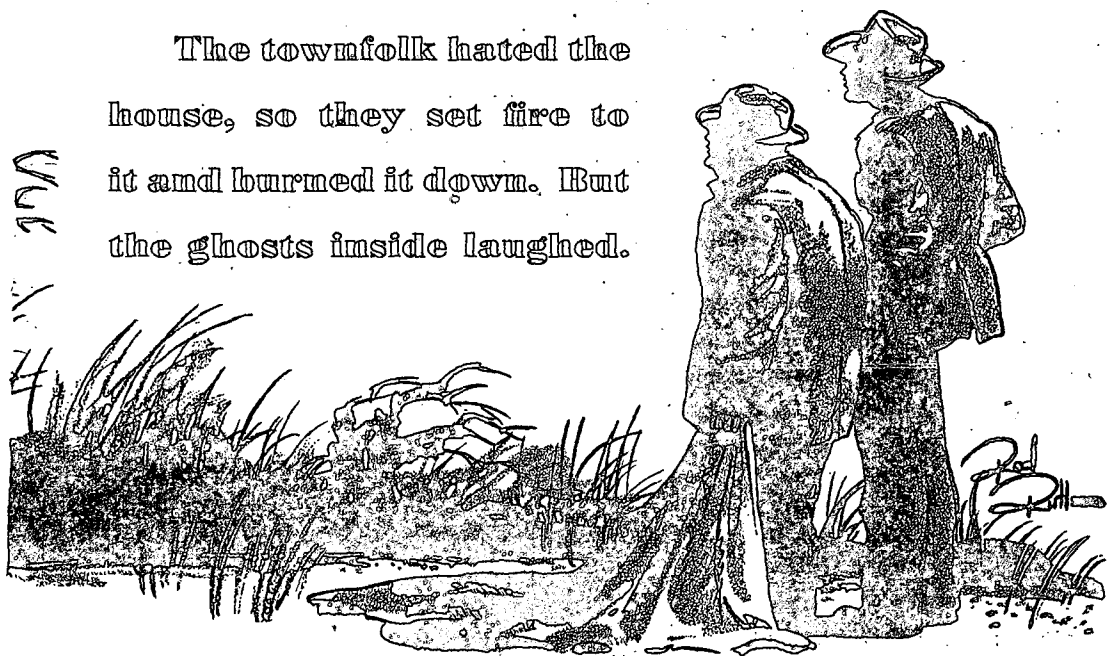
Aunt Martha had certainly picked a fine time to die. Of course we had had to go to the funeral. Hadn't she left us all her money? The baby wasn't due for another two weeks yet. We had thought we could make it easy. But we hadn't reckoned with the effects of a long trip in the car. The baby was going to come a week early.

Any minute now. I watched Mary as much as I could, ready to slam on the brakes at a moment's notice.

Something loomed across the road up ahead. It was a detour sign pointing to the left. I slowed down to a crawl and turned off the highway. The headlights revealed a one way, rutty dirt road.

We hadn't gone a block when it started to rain. It started easy. Just a few drops now and then. But the car picked that time to act up. The motor would hesitate just a little, and then pick up;

The townfolk hated the house, so they set fire to it and burned it down. But the ghosts inside laughed.



go a little ways, and then do it all over again. I glanced at the gas gauge. It showed half full.

It was raining in earnest now. Pouring down in almost solid sheets. And the car slipped from one rut to another in lurches that were tearing the heart out of Mary. I crawled along at twenty miles an hour, trying to make it as easy on her as I could.

And every minute or so the motor would hesitate a little, then pick up again. It was getting worse each time.

A LONG hill loomed ahead, with black trees coming right to the edge of the road. The water was pouring down the ruts in the road. I switched to intermediate at the foot of the hill and gunned the motor. The hind end slipped and skidded in and out of the ruts all the way to the top.

Just as we slid over the hump the motor stopped altogether. I shut off the headlights and stepped on the starter. It ground out hopelessly. The motor was dead.

Down at the foot of the hill ahead of us one lonely light blinked. It must be a house. I turned the headlights back on and let off the brakes. The car coasted downhill, bouncing from side to side.

It came to a stop about three hundred yards from the light.

"Do you think you could make it to that house?" I asked my wife.

"I don't know, Fred," she replied, "but I'll try."

I shut off the lights and climbed out. The mud came up around my shoes as I walked around the front of the car to the other side.

Taking the flashlight out of the glove compartment and turning it on, I helped Mary get out. As she stepped from the running board a flash of lightning lit up the surroundings as bright as daylight.

I could see the look of suffering in her eyes, and no doubt she could see the look of worry on my face, because she said, "Don't worry, darling. Everything will turn out all right."

Her voice was so calm and soothing I could almost believe her. I didn't say anything because—well, dammit, it was thundering so much she couldn't have heard me anyway!

With my arm around her waist and the flashlight turned to the ground just ahead of her, Mary made it down the road until we were even with the light, which came from about thirty feet off the road.

The flash of lightning had shown it to be an old style, three story, gable house. Half the shutters were gone from the windows, and half of those that remained hung at crazy angles from one hinge.

The wind wasn't too strong. It moaned through the trees quietly, and creaky noises came from the direction of the house. As we stood there and looked at it from the road for a minute, while Mary was resting, and it jumped out of the darkness with each flash of lightning, I thought that some movie producer would give a million dollars to have this setting, just as it was, to produce a movie horror picture.

The lightning flashes revealed a winding path going from the road through the grass and weeds to the front porch of the house. I had given up trying to keep my feet out of puddles. They were sopping wet. And the rain soaked into my suit and shirt, and had even gone through my hat now so that the sweat band was wet and clammy.

I kept my arm around Mary and walked off the path in the weeds so that I could keep her from falling. It seemed like ages before we reached the bottom step to the porch.

As we set foot on the porch the front

door swung open. Sometimes the thing you should expect is so startling that it is stupefying.

In spite of the storm and the lighting, in spite of the broken, creaking shutters, and the air of mysterious un-earthliness of the house, I had expected a normal, cheerily dressed farmer's wife to meet us at the door. Or even the farmer himself, in dirty overalls, maybe with a beard; a pipe stuck in his mouth, perhaps.

Perhaps, subconsciously, I had feared it would not turn out that way. But my wife needed help. Sane help, of a normal standard, understandable woman, if not of a doctor.

So when I looked at the figure standing in the dimly lighted doorway, almost silhouetted, something died in me. From that instant on, the sense of unreality of this night dominated everything.

HE WOULD have been big if he had stood straight. But even humped over, with his vacant face stuck out a foot farther than it seemed possible it could be, his head was level with mine.

Edgar Bergen must have met him sometime, or he could not have made Mortimer Snerd's voice so exactly like his. He stood in the doorway, silently watching us creep across the porch, until we were only two feet from him.

Then he opened his mouth and chuckled in what he thought was a friendly manner and said only one word. "Hello." It was then I instinctively looked behind him for Bergen. But he wasn't around. I didn't blame him. Right then I would have given five years salary to not have been around myself.

"Hello," I answered, forcing myself to sound friendly and unconcerned. "Our car broke down, and the storm..."

He didn't answer, but stepped back

into the house. We took that to be an invitation to enter, and followed him. I sized him up quickly as we stepped through the door. He was about twenty years old, with the strength of two men, from the width and thickness of his shoulders, stooped until he looked like an ape. His face was large, coarse, and completely lacking in any trace of intelligence. His lips were thick, and his mouth hung open all the time, except for an occasional, momentary closing, probably due to involuntary swallowing.

He had on a baggy pair of faded overalls and a worn out pink plaid shirt. His arms hung limply at his sides, the hands thick hams with short trunks for fingers.

As I closed the front door behind us he half turned, and raising his voice a little, said, "Oh, ma. Some folks are here to see you."

"What's that?" a sharp female voice came from the direction of the stairs.

"Hello up there," I called, putting all the friendliness in my voice I could. I knew that if someone human didn't show up soon I would drag Mary out of there and go back to the car.

A white blob appeared over the banister of the upper landing of the stairs. It jerked back, and then a figure started down the steps.

It was obviously the mother of the thing that had let us in. There was a family resemblance in the stooped over posture. But the rest made me think of New England witches. A coal black dress that hung on her like a sack. A black shawl over her head. Slim blue veined hands. Pasty, wrinkled face. Long nose, and protruding chin.

"This does it," I muttered to my wife. She nodded her head in silence.

"How do you do," she greeted, bobbing her head. Then she cackled, just as I knew she would.

"Hello," I said, smiling sickly. "The storm caught us, and my wife is going to have a baby any minute. Do you have a phone so we could get a doctor?"

"Oh, isn't that nice," she remarked inanely. Then, as if realizing the gravity of the situation she started toward the dirty cot against the wall that served for a davenport, saying over her shoulder, "Bring her over here where she can lie down."

Then, to her son, "Alvin! Go into the kitchen and put a dishpan of water on to heat."

"Yes, ma," he said obediently. Then, with a friendly look at me, and another Snerd chuckle, he turned and disappeared into the kitchen.

I HALF carried Mary over to the cot.

She sank onto it as if she never expected, nor wanted to ever get up again. Then she looked up at me with a wan smile that pulled at my heart strings.

"Do you have a car? Or are there any neighbors near that I could get in touch with a doctor through?" I asked the old woman anxiously.

"No neighbors," she hacked. "But I can take care of your wife just the same as a doctor. Many's the time I've brought little ones into the world." She pointed vaguely toward the kitchen. "Brought him into the world all by myself!" She cackled proudly.

I shuddered at the prospect of having a son like that. But if I lived out the night I would probably lose my own mind and wander around with a vacuous expression on my face the rest of my life.

"I'll see how Alvin is coming with the water," the old lady muttered aloud to herself, darting toward the kitchen.

I took Mary's hand in mine, not bothering to answer the old lady. Mary squeezed my hand and smiled. Then she bit her lip again and gripped my

hand spasmodically.

Finally she relaxed and opened her eyes. "It will come in a little while now," she remarked dreamily.

I ground my teeth with a feeling of helplessness. There was nothing I could do except pray, of course. I didn't dare leave her to work on the car. I had an idea what was wrong with it now, but even if I got it fixed it was too late to get her into a hospital. It would be better for her to have it here than in the car.

The old lady came back finally with a pan of hot water, her son following with a handful of yellowish white rags that had once been towels. She set the water on a rickety chair and took the towels from her son.

"You two boys go into the kitchen," she hacked in what *she* thought was a motherly tone of voice. "You'll only be in the way here, and I don't want you under foot."

I forgave her mentally for putting me in the same class with her son, and followed him through the door to the kitchen. The lamp in the kitchen was smoking and the chimney had darkened so that its light came out in streaked shadows that projected weird pictures on the dirty, plastered walls.

I glanced around curiously. The nine foot ceiling had a large section of plaster missing over the sink, and cracks spread from it like martian canals in all directions, to form an intricate network over the entire ceiling.

The walls had fared better, and aside from an occasional crack, were in good condition. The large bucket of water by the sink gave the lie to the two faucets. If there had ever been hot and cold running water it was now a part of the ancient history of the house. The floor was of first grade oak and the woodwork and doors of solid mahogany.

"I used to have a dog," Alvin broke in on my silent inspection. "He hasn't come home for two weeks. I can't understand it. He started to sob and rubbed at his eyes with fists so huge they did little more than rub his cheek.

I WAS instantly sorry for him. Despite the danger of life and limb that lay in his frame, if he were ever aroused, inside he was just like a child. Patting him gently on the shoulder I said, "Would you like to have another dog, Alvin? I'll get you one if you do."

"Would you?" he asked wonderingly. "Gee!" He choked back his tears and leered at me in what he seemed to think a friendly and pleasing manner.

With great effort I kept from shuddering and tiptoed to the door. Opening it a mere crack, I peeked into the front room. The old witch was busy over Mary. Mary's eyes were closed, and her lower lip was sucked in, her teeth clamped on it.

"Would you like to come upstairs and see what I got?" asked Alvin eagerly.

"Not now," I shrugged him off.

"Aw, come on," he pleaded, and took my arm.

I looked at his hand and arm, and a picture of what they could do to me made me give in without a struggle.

Chuckling sobberingly, Alvin took my hand and led me to a door that opened up on the back stairs.

"What about taking the lamp?" I asked.

"Oh, we won't need that," he said with a friendly leer. "I know the way."

Without resistance I gave in. My hand was completely lost in his as I stumbled up the steps in absolute darkness. After what seemed an hour to my feverishly active brain we reached the second floor landing. Alvin's breathing was loud in the quiet dark-

ness. And I could feel my heart beating against my ribs as I stumbled down the hall, led by this mindless hulk.

We started to ascend another stairway. I tried to pull back, but Alvin kept climbing, apparently oblivious of my terror and eager to show me what he had. And now my overworked imagination began to paint pictures of something sinister. A room full of skeletons, a beautiful girl in chains, held prisoner by this halfwit and his witch mother for some sinister reason, an insane father in a padded room—all the crazy things I had read about in horror stories crowded into my mind to torture me.

By the time we reached the third floor landing I was pulling back with all my strength. But Alvin kept a firm grip on my hand and ambled along in the total darkness unmindful of my struggles.

He pulled me through a doorway. We were in a small room with one window, against which the rain beat violently. A flash of lightning lit the room dimly for a second. The dark hulk of Alvin's form was bending over something.

I TURNED in terror to dash out of the room. Instead, I bumped against the door and it slammed shut with a loud bang that shook the floor. Frantically I searched for the doorknob. My hand encountered nothing but flat surfaces. I opened my mouth to cry for help, but no sound came out.

And then Alvin struck a match. The room lit up and I turned around, dreading to look, and yet compelled to see what horror this room contained.

Alvin replaced the chimney on the lamp he had just lit. On the table beside the lamp was a pan of water. He pointed proudly to a small, crudely made, toy sailboat, floating in the pan.

"See?" he said in a very proud voice.



"I made it all by myself!"

I leaned weakly against the closed door. Glancing around I saw that the room contained only the table upon which the lamp and the pan of water rested, a rickety chair with the legs wired together, and a cot on which dirty blankets were piled. The wall in which the window was set slanted up to meet the ceiling in the middle of the room. Bare rafters formed the ceiling, and the dim light from the lamp went past them to cast vague shadows on the under side of the roof.

I pulled out my handkerchief and wiped my damp face. Then I drew in a long, shuddering breath. "That's fine, Alvin," I said with forced enthusiasm. "You made it all by yourself? Well, you certainly did a fine job."

Alvin's chest expanded in pride.

"But I think we'd better get downstairs now," I added. "Your mother might need us any minute now."

"Yes, that's right," he said slowly. "I forgot about *her*." He hesitated in such a way that I knew he was referring to Mary.

\* \* \*

In the kitchen again, I went to the door to the front room and started to open it. As my fingers touched the knob, a sound came from the other room. It was the sound of a *baby* crying!

I threw the door open and rushed in. The old witch was holding a small baby in her hands. *MY* baby! It was yelling lustily. A glance told me it would be all right, so I ran over to Mary's side. Her eyes were closed, her breathing heavy and uneven.

I looked up at the old lady fearfully. Her eyes were worried.

"Your wife is pretty bad off," she said. "She might not live through it."

"Now that the baby's come I don't need to stay with her," I said. "I'll go

out and see if I can find out what's wrong with the car. I've got to get Mary to the hospital."

I dashed toward the front door, taking the flashlight out of my pocket. As I opened the front door I mentally kicked myself for being so terrified on the stairs that I had not remembered it. There had been no need for that horrible journey upstairs to have been made in darkness!

I stumbled down the path to the road through the rain, thunder and lightning rolling across the black sky. Twice I stumbled and fell in the mud.

Finally I reached the car and lifted the hood. It took only a moment to find the broken wire and fix it. Climbing in, I stepped on the starter and the motor took at once.

With a clash of gears I started along the road. The wheels spun, and the car slid all over the road, but I finally came to a stop even with the path to the house.

Leaving the motor running, I ran down the path, bounded up the front steps and opened the front door. Mary's eyes were still closed.

Picking her up gently, I carried her down the steps and back along the slippery path, placing her in the back seat of the car. Then I ran back for the baby.

The old witch had wrapped it in a dirty blanket. I took it out of her arms and ran out of the room throwing a hasty thanks over my shoulder and a muttered promise to return the blanket as soon as Mary was safely in the hospital.

WITH the baby on the front seat beside me I put the car in low, slowly let out the clutch so that the wheels would take instead of spinning. As the car moved slowly forward I glanced in the direction of the house.

At that moment a flash of lightning brighter than any before lit up the scene so that it was as bright as day.

That instant flash photographed every detail of the house on my mind so strongly that I knew I would never forget it. There were now two lighted windows. Alvin had forgotten to blow out the lamp in his room on the third floor.

It was an old style mansion. Two full stories with a high roof. Three gables were set into the roof slope in the front. Light was flowing feebly from the window in the one to the right.

The front porch was a wide, ornate affair, the fancy frill work falling away, some of it gone. The narrow lap siding of the walls was split in many places, pulled out in some.

Several dead trees were scattered about in the weed covered front yard. From their arrangement it was obvious the yard had once, long ago been beautifully landscaped.

The architecture of the house, wrecked and paintless as the house itself was, spoke eloquently of a glorious past. As I topped a rise in the road and glimpsed the lights of a city in the distance I thought, "The house is a ghost. A spirit of something that WAS, long ago. And the people in it, that halfwitted but childishly friendly giant and his slightly mad old witch of a mother, aren't really people. Just the spirit of the house. The mindlessness of the man, the emptiness of the house. His hulking frame, the giant body. His vacant eyes, its empty future. And the little old lady in black was the spirit of all the people who had lived there."

Then I shook myself, as if waking from some nightmarish dream, and, with my eyes on the lights of the distant city, shifted into high and gathered speed on the long downgrade.

The rain had stopped now. And the sky, drained clean of the ugly black clouds that had covered it, almost imperceptibly grew light with the early rays of dawn.

MARY'S pale face was framed by a clean, white pillow. The hospital sheets were pulled up under her chin so that all that showed was her face and hair. Her eyes were closed, the lids dark.

I stood wet and miserable beside the bed. Wet and shivering, but with thankfulness in my heart. The baby was a boy, safely in the care of a competent nurse now. And my wife would live.

The doctor was putting away his stethoscope and bottles. He was a typical country doctor. Average height, around fifty, his stocky body draped in a tweed suit.

"You are very lucky, Mr. Johnson," he said to me. "Your wife has gone through this remarkably. Wet to the skin, with no doctor in attendance, it's a wonder she lived at all. Where did you say she had the baby?"

"It was an old three-story house on the detour toward Springfield. You probably know the place. In a kind of a gully. A little old lady lives there with her son. He's a halfwit, about twenty years old. He must weigh well over two hundred."

The doctor looked at me with a queer look in his eyes. For some reason I could not fathom I started to tremble violently. I put my shaking hand up to get a firm grip on my jaw to keep my teeth from rattling.

The doctor just kept looking at me. Then he turned to the nurse and said quietly, "Do you know the place, Miss Walters?"

"Why,—why yes, doctor. Isn't that the place—"

"Certainly. Certainly," he shut her off. Then he turned his piercing eyes on me again.

"Suppose, Mr. Johnson," he said softly, "we take that blanket back to the old lady. Your wife will be all right now. Let's take the blanket back, and then you can get a room in the hotel and get some sleep."

"Fine," I answered, somewhat relieved. But there was still something I couldn't lay my finger on. Something, deep in my very soul, it seemed.

\* \* \*

The doctor's face was straight ahead, his eyes on the road. I sat beside him in his car as it purred along, the damp, dirty blanket on my lap. I was still trembling, and I wasn't saying anything because that deep, fearful something inside of me made me afraid to talk.

The doctor's calm silence was slowly unnerving me.

Just before we reached the crest in the road that hid the house from view he turned his head slightly and said, "If it wasn't for that old blanket—"

"What do you mean, doctor?" I asked hoarsely.

"You can see for yourself in just a minute," he answered and relapsed into silence.

The doctor's car dipped gracefully downward as the crest of the long hill was passed. Ahead through the trees would be the house. I strained my eyes to catch a glimpse of it.

I couldn't see it. "I guess it must be over the next rise," I said.

The doctor didn't answer. His eyes were on the road. He had slowed the car down to a crawl, craning his neck to see every inch of the road. Suddenly he stopped the car and pointed to a spot on the road.

"Is that one of your footprints?" he asked.

I looked wonderingly. Then I

climbed out of the car and looked at it closely. There were others like it along the side of the road. Some had a deep imprint as of a woman's heel. Some were made by a man's shoes.

I turned and looked at the doctor. He stared at me intently, his face expressionless.

**S**UDDENLY some unknown emotion shook me. I started to follow those footprints frantically. I glanced wildly about, looking for the house.

The footprints turned off the road onto a path that wandered crookedly through the weeds. *That* was the same path!

I looked up. The house *had* to be there. The path led up to a broken, stone foundation. Piled around the foundation were heaps of charcoal and half burned boards. "The house had burned after we left. Alvin's lamp had set it on fire," I thought.

But again that unknown emotion gripped me. I ran and stumbled down the path. My eyes searched out every footprint in the mud. I followed until they reached the place where the front steps were lying, crumbled and charred.

Then I surveyed the scene, expecting to see wisps of steam rising from the hot coals, the remains of what, a few short hours before had been the house. There were no wisps of steam.

I stumbled into the charred ruins. They were cold. Wildly I looked around. My brain was screaming, "You are mad! You are *mad!*"

My aching eyes came to rest on the cot. It was inside the end foundation wall, its legs sunk in ashes. There were blankets and a mattress on it. Dirty. Streaked with black and grey. Sodden.

Slowly I took the blanket from under my arm where I had put it unconsciously when I climbed out of the doctor's car. It too was streaked with black and

grey. It too was heavy with the rain. The memory of my mad dash to the car with the baby came up before my eyes. *There had not been time for it to become even damp!*

Wonderingly, I stepped through the piles of ashes and stood beside the cot. My eyes took in its every detail. The depression on it, showing that someone had lain on it recently. The signs of childbirth.

My brain began to spin. I swayed. A firm hand on my shoulder steadied me. I turned my head and looked into the sympathetic eyes of the doctor. I tried to speak but my lips trembled.

He gripped my shoulder reassuringly. I sucked in a deep breath and slowly let it out. Then I turned back to the cot. Reverently, if one who is mad

can be reverent, I laid the blanket on the cot.

Then I looked up in the direction where, the night before, the second floor landing had been. I seemed to see it. And again I seemed to see the white blob of the old lady's face peering over the rail. Wordlessly I thanked her. Then I turned and made my way back to the path.

I kept my eyes on the doctor's car. It was my goal. It was sanity which I must reach or perish. And as I walked firmly through the mud of the path I seemed to hear a deep, pathetic voice crying out to me.

"Come back. Come back. Don't you want to see my sailboat again? I made it all by myself."

THE END

## AMAZING FACTS ABOUT FISH

THERE is an old saying that "it takes all kinds to make a world," and this is just as true of the world of fishes as of the world of human beings, for among the finny inhabitants of the sea are fish of as many different characters, temperaments, and personalities . . . as well as physical characteristics and habits . . . as the human imagination can conceive.

One of the ablest of the professional fishermen among fish is the big, ugly goosefish. It has an enormous head, gigantic mouth, and small tapering body. Part of his fishing equipment, the lure, was provided by Mother Nature. At the tip of the fish's nose, just above his gaping jaws, are long fleshy appendages. Lying flat on the mud of the sea floor with his jaws propped open like a steel trap, he waves the "bait" back and forth luring the hungry smaller fish to their doom.

The parrot-fish changes color for protection when he sleeps. From the sea-green color he uses while awake and swimming about, his coat changes to brilliant red, orange, yellow, black, sky-blue and green in bold designs of blotches, spots, and bands. He makes his bed among the brightest colored growths of the tropical seas and loses himself among the scarlet sponges and brilliant coral animals.

Despite the fact that fishes have no vocal organs, there are some inhabitants of the briny deep who can produce loud sounds and even musical notes. Porkfishes and pigfishes are so-called because of the grunting, squealing sounds they emit. The drumfish found on the Atlantic

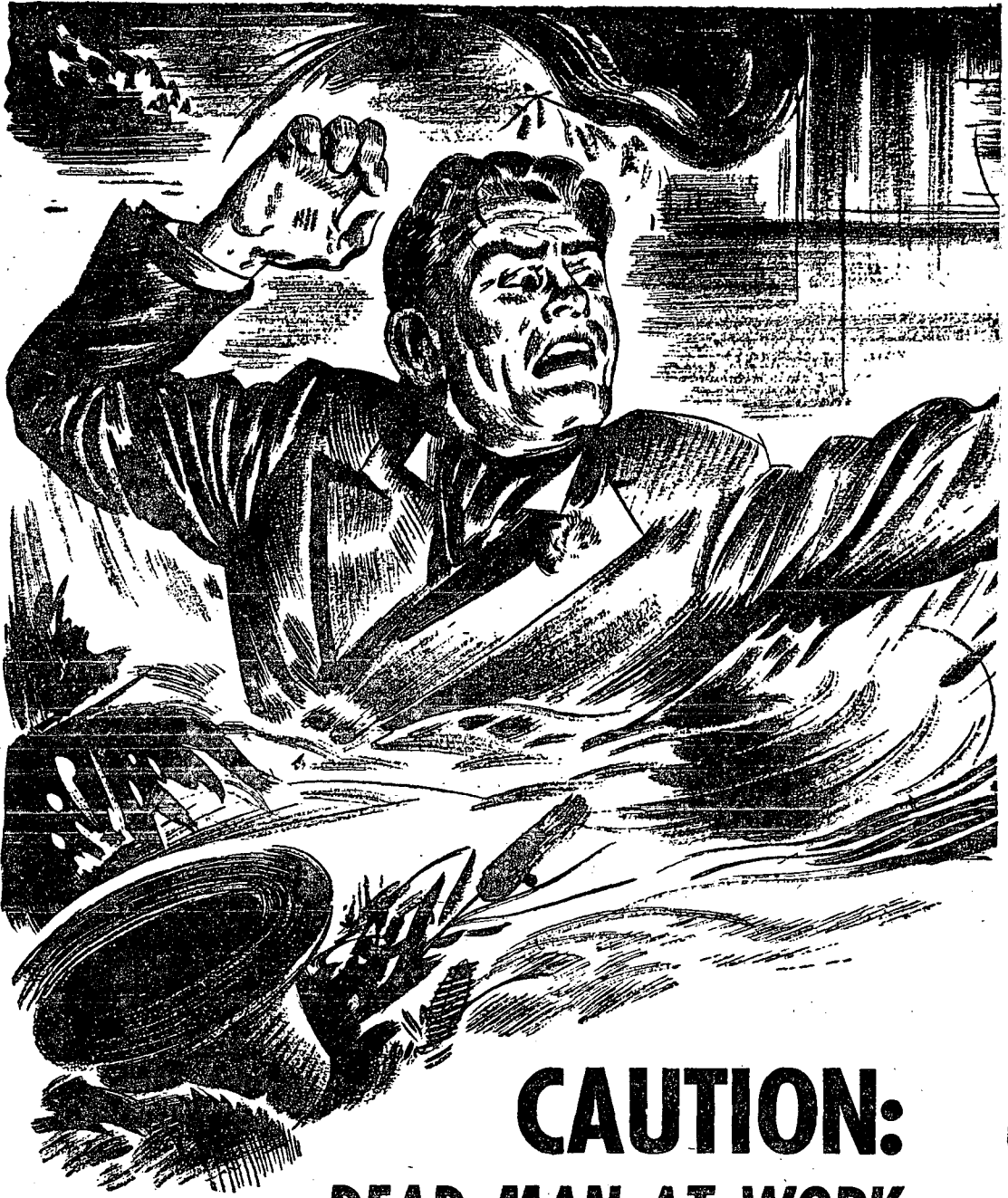
coast produces deep resonant notes by means of his air bladder. The midshipman or singing-fish is the prima donna of the sea world. It is a species of toadfish found in the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico which produces musical notes. Just how the singing-fish "sings" is not fully known, but as during its concerts the gill covers are raised and the pectoral or side fins vibrate; it is supposed that the fish makes its music by rubbing the fins against the horny plate much in the same manner as a cricket or grasshopper rubs its legs against its wings.

The trillight-fish is one of the strangest inhabitants of the sea. It fairly blazes with multicolored lights. Among its sides are rows of golden-yellow lights; back of each eye is a brilliant headlight; where his ventral fins should be are twin lights of yellow and red, while on either side of the body is a patch of countless tiny lights which glow green or gold by turn. Finally as a finishing touch, he trails along thread-like appendage fastened to his under jaw which is several times the length of his entire body.

The shark is one of the most difficult monsters of the deep to kill. Its tenacity of life is almost incredible. When completely disemboweled and thrown back into the sea, it will actually swim off but is soon tore to pieces and devoured by his fellows attracted by the blood from the mutilations. More astonishing still is the fact that a shark's heart will continue to beat for over an hour after it has been removed from the creature's body.

—Gary Lee Horton





# **CAUTION:**

## **DEAD MAN AT WORK**

By **ARTHUR T. HARRIS**

John Stanton died, and strangely he knew what was going on.  
He lay in his coffin and watched as his own funeral was prepared . . .

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With a despairing cry he plunged into the muck and began to sink. "Quicksand! Help me!" he screamed

THEY are going to take me away now, he thought drowsily. They will be very kind and gentle about it, because after all it is my body, and not me, that will be lowered into the grave about two hours from now.

I suppose I am dead, he thought with an odd satisfaction. That is to say, that much of me is dead which they wanted to die. But perhaps I am still alive—in the spirit, of course. Or perhaps my soul.

Ah—here they come! The minister, the Rev. Charles Black. A decent old soul, Black. He doesn't know that he will officiate, unwittingly to be sure, at the end result of a murder.

For they might just as well have killed me, when their crowning deceit,

their nasty, vicious back-biting, their cheap office politics forced me to swallow that overdose of sleeping tablets the night before last . . .

What's in a name? he thought. My name is Stanton—John Stanton, but that didn't mean anything to my wife when the Army discharged me three months ago. I might have been John Doe for all that meant to her.

Oh, she had everything arranged, all right, in her indirect, sweet, conniving way, Stanton reflected bitterly. She'd taken over the restaurant when he enlisted. Taken it over with full power of attorney; added a bar; even traded discreetly in the black market, when meat and butter and sugar ran short.

A business woman, Mary Stanton.

Plenty of time on her hands after she'd got the place organized properly. A great little "organizer," Stanton thought. There wasn't much time on her hands, though, when that 4-F head waiter, Mike O'Hara, began to play his cards in the approved method of a third-class heel . . .

Now the "mourners" had gathered round the "corpse," Stanton realized. He couldn't actually see them, of course. But he could sense their presence as they stood about the open casket. And he thought he could hear what they were saying, before the Rev. Black began the burial ceremonies.

"The poor, poor man!" Mary Stanton simpered. There was something suspiciously well-tailored in the lines of her black widow's gown.

"A war hero," Mike O'Hara said cynically in his assured, head waiter's voice. "As you say, my dear, he was never quite the same when he got back."

Never quite the same, Stanton reflected sardonically. Never a hint of the times he'd caught O'Hara in his wife's arms—and vice versa; never a mention of the storm when he discovered how ownership of the restaurant had been juggled away from him; never an iota of decency from these two human vultures.

**W**ELL, anyway, he considered, when the mourners had trooped by his comfortable coffin to satisfy their last morbid doubts, Mary and her boy friend had certainly rounded up a good crowd. Must have been a hundred people, more or less, from the sound of their muted footsteps.

(And when they've shoveled the dirt over my head, he thought, the "funeral" cortege will step on the gas and beat it over to Stanton's Cafe—my restaurant, my bar. They'll go on into the new

cocktail lounge, close the doors and drown their "sorrow" in Schenley's, Vat 69, Three Roses. *My liquor.*)

On the drive out to the cemetery, Stanton began to comprehend slowly what was wrong. In fact, the mere realization he was capable of comprehension put him in a mental cold sweat.

After all, he considered with a sense of ironic inner tension, wasn't it rather odd for a "dead" man to exercise his mental capacities? The dead ought to *be* dead. At least physically. Good men went to heaven and bad men went to hell.

Provided they had actually died.

In any event, that is what Stanton had always profoundly believed all his life. Stanton was not a complicated soul, and he was certainly not a fanatic about anything. But death, beyond a violent physical revulsion, had entailed for him no spiritual suffering, even when he thought his number was up on the Normandie beaches, at St. Lo and at Aachen.

But this, now—this was something different. The sleeping tablets—fifteen barbiturate capsules, relatively harmless when taken one at a time—were sheer poison gulped down the way he'd swallowed them. He had certainly assumed, as he drifted off into coma, that he was about to die.

Well, then, he was dead. *But in a muted, impalpable way John Stanton had known for hours just what was going on about him!*

This is very odd, Stanton thought.

This is so odd, he decided, that perhaps he ought to do something about it. For obviously it was not yet his time to die. If it was intended that he should live spiritually through his intended physical suicide, then just as assuredly it lay in the cards that there was a certain cowardice in trying thus vainly to run away from himself.

Snatches of conversation from the hearse's cab suddenly became clearer, as his mind grew more alert.

"... and I don't like that smoothie with his wife, either," one of the two men up front, perhaps the driver, was saying. "He pays too damned much attention to details. For a guy supposedly broken up by his friend's death, he's putting on the lousiest act I ever saw."

"You're getting psychic, Sam," said his companion. "On the other hand, that woman isn't crying herself to death. And it don't look exactly proper, the way she leans on this guy's arm. I think maybe she likes this guy more than a widow should."

"Well, maybe she doesn't want to be a widow all her life," the first man said sourly. "I guess this ain't the first time a fellow couldn't take all the monkey business that went on around him. Suicide, hell. Why do they always have to take the easiest way out? Why can't they face the facts?"

"Don't be stupid, Sam. That would be bad for business. After all . . ."

Now John Stanton's brain was really in a turmoil. For the cynical funeral employes had entirely confirmed his own racking doubts. What had he done to himself? Why had he run away?

There was no road back now, of course. Or—was there?

LATER, no one was quite certain how it had happened. The drive to the cemetery lay over twisting country roads. It was raining, more than usual at that time of year. The highway was slippery, windshield wipers dispelled the raindrops, but not the moist ground fog. It kept welling up, to slow the cortege down and fray everyone's nerves in their anxiety to get the whole unsavory spectacle over with.

The hearse began to weave slightly down the rain-glossed road.

"Take it easy, boy," Sam's driving companion said.

"That's not what you said a minute ago!" Sam snapped.

"I haven't said anything for ten minutes," the other replied sharply. "Wake up, pal. Maybe you've been in this racket too long."

"Knock it off," Sam complained, trying to check his unaccountable frustration. "You know damned well you just said I didn't have to be so careful with a corpse. You said—"

"I didn't say anything!" the other almost yelled. "I—I Look out, Sam! We're gonna skid. Don't slam the brakes down, ride it out—"

And John Stanton laughed. He shook with a weird, inside laughter that was wholly of the senses.

*It had worked, then.*

He had focused his entire spiritual being on the driver's brain. Released of its bodily impediment, Stanton's mind for the first time in his conscious existence felt free to project itself beyond the accepted limits of his individual self.

Himself, he could not move. He could not breathe, eat or threaten his enemies in a physical sense. But no man could shackle his spirit.

Like an invisible mental rapier, his mind had made contact with the driver's. "Let up on that wheel, Sam," he'd said. "No corpse ever minded getting bounced around. Let's have a little fun, Sam. The road is skiddy—no one will know the difference. Let's show this funeral up as a phony!"

And Sam had taken the bait. A mere mortal, he assumed that the man next to him was trying to pull a fast one.

Now, unfortunately, matters were entirely out of hand.

"Sam!" the other man yelped. "We're headed for the ditch! We'll lose our jobs! We'll—"

There was a mad screech of brakes behind, as the first limousine full of mourners tried frantically to avoid a head-on collision with the swerving hearse. The attempt was not a great success. The hearse and its two attendants and its corpse skidded diagonally across the highway, clipped into a telephone pole, ripped through fender and wheel and turned over.

The car behind managed to tangle chromium bumpers and headlights before it too went into the ditch, but right side up. The rest of the cortege alternately skidded, weaved and swore as nervous drivers strove to keep irreplaceable cars from the junk heap.

WHEN the whole funeral had finally come to a dead stop, people were crowded around the hearse cab, trying to extricate the frightened but uninjured attendants. No one remembered the body in back. It was a damp, miserable day, and the mourners were much too annoyed and uncomfortable to bother with John Stanton's scrambled bones.

Scrambled was precisely the word.

Attendants found that out when they pried open the hearse doors at the rear. The casket, naturally, was upside down—and what was worse, it had sprung open. The coffin, too, not of the best workmanship—t h a n k s to Stanton's ever-loving wife—showed signs of giving way at the seams.

"This is a hell of a note," Mike O'Hara muttered through his trick mustache.

"Oh, dear! Will we have to buy another coffin? I mean—" Mary Stanton flushed brick-red as the officiating minister, the aforesaid Rev. Black, gave her a scandalized look.

Mr. Everett Prunk, the funeral director, stood about making mental calculations. Mr. Prunk was a business man. The accident was obviously the fault of Sam, the driver. So the Prunk Mortuary would have to make good. That meant poor Sam would have his wages docked. On the other hand—

"I'm so terribly sorry this had to happen," he told the unbereaved widow, his teeth like castanets from the cold.

"So am I," she shivered back. "Do you think—"

Prunk frowned in thought. "Well, it really wouldn't be right, you know. The minister might object, and—"

"What's this, what this!" the Rev. Black demanded. "Oh, I see. Rather than delay the funeral, and get a new casket and all that—No," he decided heroically. "It wouldn't be right! Besides—Kerchoo! Oohh—my aching sinus!"

The Rev. Black shook like an aspen leaf. Mary Stanton sneezed, too. O'Hara, a hothouse weed for all his tailored physique, broke into harsh coughing. Sam, the hearse driver, broke into a sneeze. The mourners stood mournfully about, spitting, swinging their cold arms and looking dreadfully unhappy.

Everybody sneezed but the corpse.

"Well—" said the Rev. Black tentatively.

"Could we—" Mary Stanton snuffled.

"He wouldn't want us *all* to suffer," Director Prunk sniffed.

Without another word, the pallbearers, almost happy for some exercise, joined the funeral attendants. Together they heaved and hauled and got their Sunday clothes dirty. The drizzle turned into sleet, coughs turned into barks, and after a bit several cars in the cortege began playing coyly with their auto horns.



Out into the cold, clammy mist finally emerged the battered bones of John Stanton, now indecently protected by sprung casket and leaking coffin.

"This is dreadful!" complained the Rev. Black. "A sacrilege!" Yet he too lent a helping hand.

The casket was set down on the road. The pallbearers straightened up, civilian muscles sore and skin damp from sweat, despite the chill.

"Well, decided Director Prunk, as the mourners shuffled around uncertainly, "it would take less time to carry the body—I mean, Mr. Stanton—to the cemetery than to get another hearse out here. So—"

With wearied resignation, the pallbearers bent over again, gripped the slippery casket with cold hands, grunted and straightened up. No one uttered a prayer.

Not a soul of course, but John Stanton.

*They are making my funeral a mockery, he thought with intense satisfaction. This is just as it should be. Let's see where we go from here.*

SO BEGAN the long, dreary procession. The rest of the cortege were forced to get out of their cars and join the drooping parade. Like war prisoners on a death march, the mourners trooped forlornly behind the decrepit casket, spitting soft curses into the enveloping ground fog.

Presently the Rev. Black, shuffling bravely in the lead, turned quickly around.

"What did you say?" he demanded of Mary Stanton, close behind.

Stanton's newly made widow glanced nervously at Mike O'Hara, who could read her mind behind a wall three feet thick.

"Why—I didn't say anything," she chattered. And it was the truth.

"Unless I am mistaken," insisted the minister, "you made the remark to Mr. O'Hara that you hoped I wouldn't charge double for my inconvenience."

"She said nothing of the kind!" O'Hara snapped.

"She did!" growled the Rev. Black, as the pallbearers began to prick up their frozen ears.

Outraged, the minister halted dead in his tracks. Spotting the commotion, Director Prunk hurried up. Hastily he surveyed what landscape he could glimpse through the mist. Even more hastily he made his decision.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, sweating over such bad publicity for the Prunk Mortuary Emporium. "A few yards up this road, there is a short cut to the cemetery, through a rear gate. It isn't accepted form, but if some of us catch our death of cold out here—"

By this time everybody was too beat up to worry about amenities. The Rev. Black gave Mary Stanton another scandalized look, but subsided. O'Hara looked daggers at his future bride.

"You're thinking out loud!" said the look. "Shut up!"

In his coffin, John Stanton shook with disembodied laughter.

The short cut lead off the highway along a narrow, soggy path which presently meandered through scrub trees and brush. It grew darker. It became colder, clammier. One of the ladies in the party turned her ankle on a stone, cried out and halted the rest of the procession behind the pallbearers.

Anxious to get the whole business finished, the pallbearers staggered on, without the assistance of Director Prunk, who was slightly in the lead with the only flashlight.

And then, accountably, Prunk quickened his pace.



You'd better go on ahead, get the rear gate open, and arrange for the gravediggers to widen the grave, an inner voice told him. Maybe this weather has filled up the original hole.

*But Prunk thought that was the command of his own conscious mind.*

THERE was nothing essentially wrong with the short cut. But the longer the path, the denser the scrub brush.

It didn't take the pallbearers long to discover they were lost. Not really lost—it was only winter twilight now. But they had certainly missed the path.

"This is the limit!" grunted Mike O'Hara. O'Hara, ever an eager beaver, had taken up the lead. "You folks stay put. I'll find that path."

With much bravado, he lit a book-match to a soggy cigarette and went cautiously forward. He was gone for several minutes. And then—

"Help!" came an echoed scream. "Oh God, what's happening to me? I found the path again, and—Help! Help! I'm sinking! I can't move my feet! Now it's up to my knees! Hurry! Oohh—quicksand!"

"Good Lord in heaven!" breathed the Rev. Black, horrified.

"Mike! Mike!" screamed Mary Stanton, now a widow with no prospects. "Don't leave me now, Mike! I couldn't stand it! I—"

By now attendants, pallbearers and mourners were in a dreadful stew. The casket lay where they had hastily left it, as the frightened people milled about, alternately calling encouragement to O'Hara, beseeching Director Prunk to return, and looking to the Rev. Black for immediate guidance.

The minister himself was much too sensible to lead his flock on a fruitless rescue. No telling the quicksand deposits hereabouts, the mortal pitfalls

lying in wait. Yet he himself strode off toward the frantic voice.

Strode off until he himself felt insecure footing, stopped dead in his tracks, caught hold of some brush and shuffled about till his feet found firm ground.

Then he just stood there, panting.

"I'm going!" came O'Hara's hysterical shriek. "It's up to my neck now! My chin—He-e-e-l-l-p! H-e-e-l-l—"

In his coffin, John Stanton's brain danced with delirious delight.

DIRECTOR Prunk was a business man, and he had been on the ball all his life. He had opened the gate, found the shivering gravediggers, made final arrangements and retraced his steps along the short cut.

Even with his familiarity with the terrain, it was three hours before he came up with the now frantic mourners. It was now dark, and Prunk's flashlight cut lurid spirals through the dank, clammy night.

No one said a word. Except Mary Stanton, perhaps. She staggered along in the arms of Sam, the hearse driver, who thought every now and then that she might be saying something. Perhaps babbling softly. But Sam was much too unnerved at this stage, what with the smashed hearse and all, to worry about somebody else's troubles.

The casket lay where it had been set down.

The next day, with a cold wind blowing through a clouded sky, the Rev. Charles Black and a few loyal war veterans he'd hastily rounded up made a silent trip back to the woods.

"Funny," said one of the men as they raised Stanton's earthly remains. "I didn't think he was that light. I mean—"

The burial party exchanged nervous glances. The Rev. Black began to pray

softly—to himself.

*It isn't your fault, old man, a voice told the minister. You acted decently throughout. Just put it down as one of those things.*

That Sunday, his parishioners exchanged questioning glances among themselves. Why, with Christmas coming up, should the Rev. Charles Black choose "Retribution" as his theme . . .

At the present time, there is no gravestone to mark John Stanton's mortal bones. The doctors doubt that Mary

Stanton remembers much now about the funeral. The local American Legion post, apparently, will dedicate an appropriate marker next Memorial Day. In the meantime, word of Stanton's strange funeral has got about. In fact, New Year's Eve some irreverent prankster fashioned a crude marker out of wood and black paint.

The caretaker at the cemetery burned it up the next day, of course. For the sign read:

CAUTION: DEAD MAN AT WORK

#### SOUTHLAND SUPERSTITION

**T**HOUGH we are living in the so-called enlightened Twentieth century, the mystery, the magic that has chilled the hearts of primitive peoples since the dawning of mankind still survives. The citizens on the outskirts of New Orleans still hear the drumbeats and chanting voices emerge on dark and stormy nights from the heart of the swampland.

Voodooism was first brought to the swamp city of New Orleans by Negro slaves from Africa and the Indies. In the early days of the city, French officials felt little concern over the first whispered rumors of strange voodoo rites, thinking it only exaggerated gossip. By 1782 it had become such a menace in Louisiana that the governor was considering the prohibition of further importation of slaves. Fear of uprisings caused French officials to become apprehensive over these secret swamp meetings, but they were not aware of the fact that many were sponsored by superstitious white citizens of the town. There have been cases in New Orleans of wealthy white girls financing voodoo rites in the hope of winning back a lost husband or sweetheart.

Conservative citizens insist that the notorious rituals vanished long ago and are now almost completely forgotten. But there are signs which even the casual observer cannot overlook, signs which prove that the remnants of black magic still retain a firm hold on the poorer sections of the city.

One may still find a witchcraft warning on Saratoga Street scrawled in crude chalked letters on a battered shingle reading—"Bad God, keep out." There are customers from all races and stations of society to buy black magic charms and love potions. Goofer Dust, a popular commodity, is reputed to be earth from a grave. There are charms and counter-charms, and the gris gris powder which is supposed to fix an enemy if sprinkled on his doorstep.

The ways of voodooism and black magic are not over. In the French Quarter of New Orleans we have evidences that African mystery still has a firm hold on the hearts of men.

#### IF THE SEA COULD TALK

**I**F THE sea could talk, what mysteries it could unfold of the ships which have dared to straddle its waters! It alone could divulge the whereabouts of sunken treasure, and tell the romantic tales of pirate marauders, now buried in its depths. It alone knows the answer to one of the eeriest riddles of sea history, the story of the British brig, "Gloriana."

This story comes from the frosty shores of Greenland. It was 1775, and a Greenland whaler had put to sea in quest of game. Suddenly, far out, a ship was sighted apparently sailing aimlessly in an ice field. Consumed with curiosity over the strange maneuvers of the other ship, the sailors on the whaler, made tracks to overtake her. They found the "Gloriana," a British brig. Her sides were a shining sheet of ice. A blanket of snow covered her decks, and her rigging was frozen solid.

On deck, the ship appeared to be deserted, but below deck, everything appeared as normal. The "Gloriana's" captain was found sitting at his desk, at the routine task of making an entry in the log. The entry was broken off abruptly in the middle—for the captain was dead, frozen hard.

A careful examination of the rest of the brig revealed the same astounding condition. The bodies of the crew and a woman were found in the normal positions of their work, but they were all dead. It was as if time had suddenly stopped on the frozen death ship, making ice statues of all living things.

The key to the mysterious deaths did not lie in a lack of food or water, for there was an ample supply of both. Then why had everyone aboard the "Gloriana" died so suddenly that there was not even time to finish what they had begun to do?

Only the sea could tell the answer, but it was silent. Already, it had kept its secret for thirteen years before the death ship had been discovered by the whaler. That entry begun so innocently, and fated never to be completed, was dated November 11, 1762.

—Carter T. Wainwright

# STRANGE SECRETS

## OF THE SEA



By VINCENT H. GADDIS



IT WAS in October, 1944, that the ghost ship was found off the coast of Florida—drifting in the Gulf Stream with only a dog aboard. It was in perfect condition with the personal possessions of the crew intact. After being sighted by a navy blimp which notified the coast guard at Miami, the vessel was towed to shore where she was identified as the *Rubicon*, a Cuban cargo carrier. A broken hawser was hanging over the bow, and there was no indication whether the lifeboat moorings had been cut, broken or had slipped.

And it was in July, 1941, that the Portuguese lugger *Islandia*, chartered by the International Red Cross to carry packages and mail to British prisoners from Lisbon to Genoa, sighted another vessel while near the Gulf of Lyon. As the lugger drew closer, the captain noticed that the vessel was pursuing an erratic course and that there was no sign of life aboard. He flew the usual signals, but the ship did not answer. Suspicious that the vessel had been abandoned, he ordered several members of his crew to row over with him in a boat.

The mystery ship was the French cutter *Belle Isle*. Her sails were set. Everything was in shipshape order. There were no signs of trouble. Nothing seemed to be missing. But there was not a living thing on board, and the captain returned to his ship puzzled. When he arrived in Lisbon the news was flashed to the world, and another ship was added to the long list of baffling ghost vessels.

There are many dangers at sea. Fire and storm and collision are constant menaces to our shipping. We can battle storm and fire, and keep a sharp lookout for drifting icebergs, but how can we fight a phantom menace that continues to apparently seize the crews of ships, causes the vanish of large vessels equipped with radio and other modern devices, and strikes, at times, the entire crew of a ship and leaves the men dead at their posts?

For over a century this mysterious power or force has been in existence. It has no regard for international law or boundaries. It operates in times of peace as well as war. Although it has visited all the great oceans on the surface of the earth, it has, strangely enough, been most apparent in the South Atlantic near the West Indies.

Evidence of its existence lies not only in the ghostly ships it has left drifting aimlessly and in perfect condition, and in the baffling disappearances that puzzle marine experts, but also in the

many reports of mysterious objects, constructions and lights observed at sea.

When a large modern vessel, radio-equipped and carrying all known safety devices, traveling a well-known sea route with weather calm, vanishes, leaving behind no trace of wreckage, it is more than a mere disaster—it is a total and complete mystery. The sea was “like a millpond” when the British freighter *Anglo-Australian* disappeared near the Azores in March, 1938, with a crew of thirty-nine. On March 14th she radioed that she was off Fayal and that all was well.

Wreckage was reported for weeks after the *Titanic* went down in April, 1912, but in more recent years a number of large ships have disappeared without a trace although there were lifebelts on board for every person in addition to lifeboats.

The most amazing vanishing in American naval history occurred when the USS *Cyclops* disappeared. This vessel, built by Cramps in Philadelphia in 1910, was designed to coal the first-line fighting ships of our fleet while at sea by means of cables suspended from her arm-like booms. She was 500 feet long, had 19,000 tons displacement, and carried a crew of 221 and 57 passengers—including Alfred Moreau Gottschalk, U. S. Consul General at Rio de Janeiro. From Barbados, bound for Norfolk, she sailed March 4, 1918, equipped with wireless. The weather was fine, and she was sailing a well-traveled sea lane.

No radio reports were ever received. The German Admiralty confirmed the fact that no submarine was anywhere near the scene. The vessel was far from any known floating mine, but even if she had struck a mine, she would have had time to use her radio and lower boats. Despite a long and careful search, no wreckage was found. What actually happened will probably never be known.

IN 1919 the steamer *Polar Land* vanished off the coast of Nova Scotia. The sea-going tug *Conestoga* sailed from Mare Island, Calif., bound for Hawaii, in March, 1921, with four officers and fifty-two men on board. She was never heard from again. The sea guards well her secrets.

In June, 1921, ships began to disappear simultaneously without a trace off the Atlantic coast. The New York Times on June 24th announced that there were a dozen vessels on the list. Five departments of the government investigated. Then

the disappearances stopped, and no additional facts came to light. Referring to this astonishing occurrence, the late Charles Fort wrote: "And yet such a swipe by an unknown force, of the vessels of a nation, along its own coast, was soon thought of no more. Anything could occur, and if not openly visible, or if observed by millions, would soon be engulfed in forgetfulness."

The liner *Swiftstar* left the gulf end of the Panama Canal in July, 1923, and, with a crew of thirty-three, it vanished. The cargo steamer *Cotopaxi*—Charleston to Havana—disappeared in December, 1925. William Nutting, New York sportsman, following the old Viking trail in his vessel, the *Lief Erickson*, set sail for Labrador in September, 1924. He never arrived. Although a U. S. Navy cruiser and other ships searched for him, no trace of his vessel was ever found. In March, 1926, the American freighter *Sudusco* left Port Newark for the Pacific coast and vanished with a large crew. The steamer *Elkton* vanished in the Pacific in 1927.

But it was in the South Atlantic that the *Tenzam Maru* disappeared. This ship was a fast steamer, loaded with Argentine wheat, and fitted with radio apparatus. She set sail from Montevideo for Rio de Janeiro, a distance of 1,100 miles over a well-traveled lane. Days passed, and she did not arrive. No SOS had been received; no passing vessel had observed her. She vanished as completely as mists before the rising sun.

**B**UT far more mysterious are ships found in mid-sea with no life aboard. In 1840 the *Rosalie*, a large French ship, bound from Hamburg to Havana, was found in the Atlantic with her sails set, no leak, everything shipshape, and bearing a valuable cargo. The only living thing on board was a half-starved canary in a cage.

According to an account in the book *Rhode Island: A Guide to the Smallest State*, residents at Easton's Beach, R. I., in 1850, watched a strange vessel with her sails set heading straight for the rocky shore. To their astonishment the ship managed to maneuver through the tricky and dangerous channel, and it finally drifted up to the beach without suffering any damage. The fishermen hurried to the vessel to congratulate the captain for his amazing seamanship.

But there was no one except a mongrel dog sitting quietly on the deck to greet them. There was coffee on the stove, a breakfast laid out on the table, the captain's charts and instruments in order. Everything was in its place, and the weather had been calm. The puzzled fishermen found the ship's papers which revealed that she was the *Seabird*, due to arrive that day in Newport. Despite a long investigation, no trace of the ship's crew was ever found.

Then there is the story of the *Marie Celeste*, the most famous of sea mysteries. Very few persons realize, however, that the *Celeste* is only one of a long list of mysteriously abandoned vessels—a

list that extends up to the present time. The *Celeste* sailed from New York in November, 1872, bound for Genoa with a cargo of alcohol.

On December 4th the British brig *Dei Gratia* was sailing 300 miles west of Gibraltar. The *Celeste* was sighted, but the ship did not respond to signals. It was boarded, found under full sail with everything in order, but empty of life. A loose oil can was resting on a sewing machine, plainly showing that the ship had been having smooth sailing. The last entry in the log had been made ten days before. It bespoke of fine weather and revealed that the vessel had traveled 400 miles since the entry had been made.

In the main cabin the captain's watch and money were undisturbed. An unfinished letter was found in the mate's cabin. A breakfast table, set for four, was resting in one of the cabins; lying on a plate was a hard-boiled egg, peeled and cut in two, but otherwise untouched. The navigating instruments and the yawl were missing, and the hatchway was upside down—a position no sailor would leave it in. One other puzzling feature was that both bows had been cut with a knife. The ship was towed to Gibraltar. Many explanations have been offered; all of them have proved false. The passing years have only served to deepen the mystery.

**S**OMETIMES a mysterious force attacks vessels. The London *Times* once reported a case in which a fishing boat was lifted into the air by some unknown means, lifted so far that when the boat fell it sank. Several other vessels, about a quarter of a mile away, rescued the sailors. There was no wind, and the rescuers were forced to row over.

Death, in a baffling guise, has paid visits to ships on the high seas, striking down men at their posts, and leaving derelicts with silent crews of skeletons.

One report was made by the official French News Agency in November, 1913. The British ship *Johnson*, while off the coast of Chile, sighted an abandoned ship. Its masts and sails were covered with green mold, and when the ship was boarded a skeleton was found beneath the helm. Three more skeletons were found near a panel, ten were found in the crew's quarters; and six on the bridge. The decks of the vessel were so rotten that they were giving way. Dimly, on the side of the mystery ship, were the words: "*Marlborough—Glasgow.*"

Inquiry revealed that the *Marlborough* left Littleton, N. Z., in January, 1890, with a crew of twenty-three and several passengers including one woman. It was last seen in the Straits of Magellan. In April an unsuccessful search had been made for the vessel. Twenty-three years later it was found, a ghost ship with a skeleton crew. What had happened? What mysterious fate struck the ship and its crew so suddenly?

In May, 1879, the commander of the H.M.S.



*Vulture*, while in the Persian Gulf, reported that he had observed luminous waves of light that resembled a huge wheel lying beneath the surface of the sea slowly revolving. Exactly a year later the British India Company's steamer *Patna* observed a similar phenomenon in the same area. Five weeks later, in June, 1880, the steamer *Shah-jehan* reported these same puzzling shafts of revolving light off the coast of Malabar. Both of these areas are a part of the Indian Ocean.

Whether there is any connection or not between the above reports and the following remains a puzzle, but shortly after the Malabar report the Portuguese brig *Santa Maria* was found drifting in the Indian Ocean with all hands dead. The vessel was stocked with food and in good condition. The cause of the mass death was not determined. No explanation was ever forthcoming.

ON THE night of April 6, 1901, a large vessel suddenly appeared off Brooklyn, New York. Workmen at the Tebo Yacht Basin went on board. No lights were visible. Although everything was in order, there was no life aboard. The wharf workers read the name *Commodore of Philadelphia* on her side. Reports and inquiries were made. Philadelphia shipping circles had never heard of her. For two months she lay in dock unclaimed and then was towed away to rot.

Several years later a rusted tin can was found on a beach at St. Petersburg, Fla., and within was a note dated March 21, 1899. It read as follows: "Send help at once. Our ship, the *Commodore*, was wrecked two weeks ago. Send help at once. Long. 83, Lat. 91."

There is no latitude 91, but if 31 was meant, that would be off the coast of Florida. According to the note the wreck occurred in March, 1899, but it was two years later and a thousand miles away when the ship appeared in New York without a man on board and in good condition. Of course it is possible that another vessel was referred to, but ship listings have thrown no light on the enigma.

The German bark *Freja* was found on October 20, 1902, lying on her side, partly dismantled, with no one aboard, off the coast of Mexico. Only light winds had been reported at the time. The anchor was still hanging free at the bow.

Eight days later, on the night of October 28, the SS *Salisbury*, sailing in the South Atlantic, saw a huge, dark, object, bearing two lights and with a scaled back, slowly sinking. Some sort of mechanism or fins were making a commotion in the water. The weird object appeared "unearthly" to the sailors.

Recalling Rhode Island's *Seabird* case, the *Carol Deering*, a five-master of Portland, Maine, ran aground at Diamond Shoals, N. C., in February, 1921, four months before the series of disappearances were reported along the same coast. It was in good condition, but there was no one aboard. A meal was ready to be served in the galley.

In December, 1928, the Danish training ship

*Kobenhavn*, acclaimed as the largest sailing vessel in the world and equipped with radio, vanished off the coast of South Africa. In 1932 the Danish motorboat *Mexico*, which had been searching for the *Kobenhavn*, reported from Capetown that the natives of Tristan Da Cunha had observed the missing vessel off their lonely island, and it had narrowly missed disaster on a reef. It was a mystery ship without a sign of life. It finally swung away with the current and disappeared in the mists.

In April, 1932, the Greek schooner *Embricos*, while sailing near the Bermudas, found the two-masted *John and Mary* of New York registry, her sails furled, the hull freshly painted, everything shipshape, but not a soul aboard.

The *James Chester*, a thousand ton American vessel, her paintwork fresh, her brasswork polished, was boarded by the crew of a British trading ship amid the sounds of creaking wood blocks and the lapping of waves against her sides. The cabins were in disorder, but her cargo of wool was intact. There was no evidence of violence, but the ship's papers and compasses were missing. The crew had evidently left the ship in sudden panic. The vessel was towed to Liverpool and no explanation has since come to light.

THE four-masted barque *Buteshire* was found by a British steamer flying distress signals in mid-Atlantic. The ship was found to be in good order, although abandoned. The lifeboats were gone, but the lights in the cabins were still burning. The sea was calm. A search was made for the boats without success. Why should the crew of a ship in good condition in a calm sea so suddenly abandon the vessel that lights would be left burning? The fact that the boats could not be found despite good weather and a recent abandonment of the vessel only adds to the mystery.

The American-built sailing vessel *Orion* was found by an English ship in the South Atlantic with badly battered bulwarks. A boarding party found the body of a man lying on his back at the foot of some steps. A careful examination of the ship was found impossible because of the odor arising from the hold. The sailors retreated, and the *Orion* was never seen again.

The *San Antonio*, towed into a Spanish port, and the *Marion Douglas*, found off the coast of California, are two other ships found with mysteriously missing crews in recent years. In February, 1940, the U. S. Coast Guard reported that the cutter *Cartigan* had discovered a mystery derelict, the *Gloria Colite* of St. Vincent, British West Indies, about 200 miles south of Mobile, Ala. No trace of life aboard. Everything in order. Seas calm. There was "no indication as to the cause of the abandonment."

Most of the earth's surface is covered with water. The oceans have watched man's development down through the years from oar to sail and from sail to steam. The seas are deep and vast.

(Concluded on page 177)



# NATURE'S SCALE



By

R. CLAYTON



**D**ID you ever try to persuade a friend of yours into going out on a "blind date?"

Probably one of the first questions your friend asked involved the height and general shape of the girl in question. This is not strange, for people are always interested in the size and shape of things—be it a prospective girl-friend, or a fish caught on the last fishing trip, or a snake seen in the yard. As a rule people are not too accurate in describing the approximate size of an object they see. This point can be brought out by a simple experiment. Take a party of friends out into the yard and ask them to approximate the size of a full moon by comparing it to some other object of similar size. The answers will generally vary greatly. Why? Because it takes training to make the necessary mental allowances to compensate for the distance between the observer and the object. This ability is not present at birth and must be gradually learned by the individual as he or she becomes older.

Nature is also interested in size and uses this powerful factor whenever and wherever it can to keep her children under control. The problem of balancing the living element on this earth is not an easy one—for the slightest slip in calculations may result in an undreamed of disaster. For instance, let us take the case of a multiplying bacteria. Microbes generally propagate merely by splitting. A construction occurs across the medial line of the cell and soon there are two microbes instead of one. Say a single microbe were permitted by nature to divide in the above manner, say three or four times an hour. Why, in 72 hours there would be 74,178 tons worth of microbes. This is quite a number when we consider that the weight of an individual bacterium is likely to be in the vicinity of 000,000,001,884 milligrams (a milligram being 1/30,000 of an ounce). Think of what would happen in 144 hours when this tremendous number is tripled. Without a check, one microbe could probably crowd out all the living space in this earth in a short week or so. However, there is no need to worry. Nature has foreseen this possibility and by the use of certain checks has managed to keep all in relative harmony.

**I**N THIS article we shall consider the scale of living things—also the effects of size upon the general make-up of the living elements on this earth, and its important role in life.

Let us start with a brief scale of sizes. When we compare the plant and animal kingdoms it at

once becomes obvious that the largest plant can easily outsize the largest animal. The largest known animal is the sulfur-bottom whale—such an animal may exceed a hundred and fifty tons. The biggest extinct reptiles, which are so popular in adventure writings dealing with the prehistoric times, were not larger than the sulfur-bottom whale. In fact they only weighed about fifty tons, and contrary to these huge aquatic whales, were somewhat semi-aquatic in nature. Of the true land animals, the largest to be found today weigh in the neighborhood of from six to seven tons. Land animals of old may have hit a high of a little over ten tons—certainly, not much more than this figure could be considered a probable estimate.

From the above facts an important principle should now become obvious—namely, that water and not land permits children of larger size. Note, that the weight of the largest land animal is considerably lower than that of the largest water animal, also, that the figure of the half aquatic and half land animal is intermediate in magnitude. Why is this so, simply because the size of the land vertebrates must be limited by their big bones in the same manner that the weight of ceiling is limited by the supporting power of its pillars. It is a mathematical fact that the supporting power of a pillar of bone is proportional to its cross section and this fact at once limits the size possible in the land vertebrates. However, in the water we find that a different situation exists. Bones become less important as far as support is concerned. Why? Because the water itself acts as a lifting agent and helps support the weight of the animal. Let the reader try to lift a heavy person in water and this principle will immediately become quite clear. For low and behold, the heavy person will now appear light—thanks to the helping hand of the water. What then limits the size of the water vertebrates. Mainly, food supply and digestion. It is of course obvious that the larger an animal is the more cells his body contains and hence the more that animal must eat to supply this vast number of cells and also to replace them when they die. As long as an animal has the necessary food about him, and the digestion equipment for such a task—all is well. But there are limits as to the food available and the capacity of the vertebrate form of digestive system to handle this enormous amount of food. Keeping these facts in mind we must come to the conclusion that about one hundred and fifty tons of animal is tops even for a water

habitant.

UP TO now we have considered the large animals. Let us now turn our attention to the other extreme and take a look at the little half-pint members of the animal kingdom and what problems they face because of their small size. In almost all cases, insects or spiders never exceed the weight of three ounces. As a rule they usually weigh much less, for even ants an inch long weigh well below a gram. As far as fleas are concerned it takes approximately eighty thousand of them to make up one ounce worth. Now the question arises as to why the insects and spiders cannot grow to a size comparable with the vertebrates. The answer must come after a close inspection of the make-up of the average insect's respiratory system. Such an inspection should reveal the fact that the insects breathe by branching air-tubes and not through the aid of lungs as is the case in the respiratory set up of the huge vertebrates. When an animal depends upon a system of branching air-tubes to supply its oxygen hungry cells, it immediately limits its size—for this system is practical only when all the cells making up the animal be centered about a small area so that the diffusion of oxygen through the tubes can conveniently reach them. In the vertebrates the oxygen is pumped under pressure to all parts of the body in closed vessel. No matter how remote a part of anatomy may be, it is easily supplied with food and nourishment—providing the pumping station can muster a great enough pumping force to drive it there. A study of a vertebrate heart will reveal that it is a truly efficient pumping unit and can allow for a considerable size in those animals which contain it.

The question now arises as to the problems which the animals must be expected to face when they either become very large or stay very small it at once becomes obvious that it is going to find it hard to obtain the necessary water to keep it living. Why? Simply because it is dangerous for a small creature to drink directly from open water surfaces. This danger is based upon the fact that very small animals—say the size of the smaller insects—find it difficult to oppose the face of surface tension inherent in the surface—films of water. Once such a little animal becomes wet, it can no longer lift itself—since to do so, the insect would require a pulling power capable of lifting a load many times its own weight. Yes, once an innocent little insect steps into an open water surface it must at once yield to the powerful arms of the surface molecules, which act to pull that which has broken its sacred surface to its inner bosom. However, a small animal must have water if it wishes to live, and the very fact that we find small animals alive must prove that they have found a solution to this perplexing problem of obtaining water. But how? Very simple if you know the anatomical construction of small insects life. Much of the water necessary to keep an insect alive is obtained from the food which

the insect eats. Furthermore, these little water craving animals are not so apt to waste the water they have taken in. An examination of an insect's excretory organs instead of opening to the exterior, as is the case for most all other animals, opens into their intestines. This is not strange when we consider that an intestine generally has the power to absorb water back into the circulation—at least we find this to be the case of the large intestine of man. What an interesting and efficient set-up such an excretory connection makes in the case of a water stingy animal. No worry about the loss of liquid through excretions is necessary. Another method of obtaining water is by sucking in moisture through long tubular noses. The use of a long tubular nose enables an insect to take the film of moisture off solid particles and to keep away from the pulling arms of the surface molecules. The nose can be compared to a straw used to draw up the delicious contents of a double-chocolate soda without wetting the lips.

LET us now consider another phase of this important size question. Has the reader ever wondered why small animals have such tremendous appetites? In reality the appetite of any particular type of animal is of great importance in limiting its numbers on this earth. It is common knowledge that all animals must eat if they are to live—for the members of the animal kingdom do not possess the power to synthesize their own food, as is the prevailing case in the plant kingdom. If we keep this fact in mind we can immediately see that the quantity of food available to a certain form of animal tends to dictate the number of such animals possible. This must be so, for only so many can eat when a limited supply of food exists. The amount that can eat of course is not only dependent upon the amount of food that exists, but also upon the ration of each eater. We experience an analogous situation in these current times. Since our country has only a limited food supply and since we must all eat if we expect to live, a system of rationing has been inaugurated whereby each individual is allotted a definite amount of food—the amount being calculated from time to time to assure food for everybody. This is an ideal system and can easily be carried out (we all hope) when dealing with as intelligent an animal as man. However, many animals have no such system and so when a limited food supply exists the stronger members—those better equipped in the art of obtaining food—live and the weaker die. It is interesting to note that the size of an animal effects its appetite and hence the ration it will consume. In general a small animal must eat much more in proportion to its size. For example, if you intended to feed a huge number of honey bees whose combined weight totaled forty-five pounds, you would probably find that they would require 500 times as much food as a dog weighing forty-five pounds. Why? One good reason for that above has to

(Continued on page 164)

# 'I TALKED WITH GOD'

Impossible — you say? No, it is not impossible. You can do the same thing. For there has come to the earth a brilliant, shining revelation of the power of The Spirit of God. It has come because the human race, through the Atomic Bomb — could



**Dr. Frank B. Robinson**

very easily annihilate itself. So the Spirit of God has spoken and the revelation and the Power that is following, staggers the imagination. In the past 18 years, **MORE THAN HALF A MILLION** people have told us without our asking them, what happened when they too discovered the actual and literal Power of The Spirit of God, right here on earth, in their own lives.

The future is dangerous. Fear fills most hearts. But may I say to you that there can come into your life, dancing flashes of the Spiritual Power of God? I mean **NOW**. And when you do find, and know this beautiful Power, whatever problems, trials, fears which may beset you, melt away under the shimmering Power of God. In place of these fears, doubts, and trials, there comes a love-

ly Peace — a Peace which only God can give —and **POWER?** — well —the human race knows little of this **POWER**, which upsets many old conceptions of God, and puts in **YOUR** hands, and mine, the Power Jesus promised when He said:—"The things that

**I do shall ye do also."**

I want you to know of this Power. I live for no other purpose. For when this dynamic, invisible Power changed my life, my duty was very plain. **TELL OTHERS**—that's what God said to me, and I've been doing that faithfully for the past 18 years. Write me a simple postcard, or letter, **NOW**, and ask me for my 6000 word message, which will give you a slight insight into the most soul-stirring revelation from God this world has ever known. Address me as follows: —"**DR. FRANK B. ROBINSON**, Dept. 47-2, Moscow, Idaho and this message, which is **TOTALLY FREE**, will be sent by mail immediately. **But write now—ere you forget**. The address again—**Dr. Frank B. Robinson**, Dept. 47-2, Moscow, Idaho.

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(Adv.)

## NATURE'S SCALE

(Continued from page 162)

do with the fact that the smaller an animal gets the greater the proportion of surface to weight becomes. What does this all mean? Simply that a certain weight made up of small units will present a greater surface than the corresponding weight, represented in one large bulk. Also, since the amount of heat that escapes from a body is greater when that particular body presents a greater surface per given weight to the environment—we would expect smaller animals to lose more heat per given weight than larger animals. This is exactly the case and therefore a small animal has to eat much more to make up for this extra rate of heat loss. Nature uses the above principle not only to limit numbers, but to make her children as comfortable as possible and restrict them to certain areas of her domain. Have you ever wondered why an African elephant has such big ears? Again the principle surface enters into the picture. In the case of the African elephant, the huge outer ears are there because of the added surface which they supply, and by increasing the total surface of the elephant's bulk—

some 15%, they cool the elephant considerably. In direct opposite, the animals inhabiting the northern regions will tend to cut down all projections which might increase the surface—for they want as little of their heat as possible radiated. In passing we might note the fact that the warmer climates foster an abundance of insects and smaller life not found in the northern regions—simply because smaller animals are best prepared to keep cool.

Does the proportion of surface to weight have any effect in the prevention of disastrous falls? The answer is yes. For while it is true that in a perfect vacuum all bodies regardless of size and shape should fall at the same constant accelerated speed, this mathematical fact does not apply completely in nature—where air resistance comes into play. Also, the greater the proportion of surface to weight the greater the resisting force of air upon a falling body. Keeping in mind the fact that smaller bodies have this greater surface proportion, we must arrive at the conclusion that a small animal, in general, is less likely to be injured during a fall. This is actually the case. In many cases a dog or cat will be killed from a fall that would only stun a mouse. Yes, that old-famous saying certainly applies—namely: The bigger they are the harder they fall.

COMING!

## THE TITANS

By Heinrich Hauser

### STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933.

Of Amazing Stories, Published Monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1946

State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Amazing Stories and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, W. B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Editor, R. A. Palmer, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Managing Editor, H. Browne, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; A. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; W. B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; S. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Wm. B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; B. G. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is \_\_\_\_\_. (This information is required from daily publications only.) A. T. PULLEN, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1946. [SEAL] DORIS PALOWSKY. (My commission expires April 25, 1949.)



# DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.



## QUESTION: WHAT CONCRETE EVIDENCE . . . ?

Sirs:

I am getting disgusted with all this mess about the Shaver Mystery.

Question: what concrete evidence has ever been found and verified by known authorities, not suddenly found geniuses? Huh?

Philip Jensen,  
301 Market St.,  
New Cumberland, Pa.

What concrete evidence? Well, to begin with, we refer you to "Scientific Mysteries" in this issue (page 166). Here is concrete evidence and by a scientist, not a newly found "genius," whatever that is. Our files (more than 10,000 letters) are more concrete evidence. They tell a story even more amazing than any printed. Your daily papers are full of reports of unsolved things that are a part of the mystery. For instance: (quote) Los Angeles, Oct. 14—(U. P.)—The Los Angeles Daily news (unquote; because we haven't permission to reproduce the clipping, and so we'll just give-the gist, which is common knowledge). During the Giacobini-Zinner meteor shower on Oct. 9 at least twelve persons reported a large, bullet-shaped object with wings that left a vapor trail behind it and which could not have been any existing airplane or a meteor. All seemed positive that it was "some sort of space ship." William L. Nabers, San Diego County Hospital attendant was one man who saw it. Check with him if you wish. We have hundreds of such clippings; Charles Fort collected thousands; Vincent H. Gaddis has many more thousands. Collectively, they are too powerful an argument FOR the mystery to deny. After all, the mystery is not just "are there caves with dero and tero in them?" but it has to do with these space ships, other inhabited worlds, and so on. You want more "weird stuff"? Have you read TIME's description of the Newfoundland air crash? Bald-faced mystery, we call it, supposedly straight reporting. If it is, it's incredible—if it's not, TIME is just another fantasy magazine!—Ed.

## AMAZING EXPERIENCE—CORROBORATED!

Sirs:

I have had the most amazing experience of my life. On Sept. 22 I visited a friend of mine twelve miles east of this city. About 3 o'clock I left my friend's house and started back to the city. After driving half the distance my car went dead while passing a long open field on my right. It seemed

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Each Additional Child	\$ .25	\$ .73	\$ 1.43	\$ 2.75

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### Miscellaneous

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as if somebody had reached out and cut my ignition. Pulling my car to the side of the road, I let it roll to a stop. Thinking it must be some kind of ignition trouble, I got out and started around to the right hand side of the car. It was then that I heard the noise. It sounded like the low whine of an electric motor just starting up. I looked around trying to locate the source of the sound. It continued to gain in volume. I became alarmed as I could see nothing. From a whine the noise changed to a hissing scream. It sounded more like compressed air then, or gas at tremendous pressure escaping. Louder and louder the noise grew until it was a vibrating roar.

Then, out in the field to my right, in a stone's throw of the road, a great cloud of dust rose in the air, then with a deafening roar, the invisible force or whatever it was took off like some titanic rocket toward the southwest. It crossed the highway on a 45 degree angle throwing great clouds of dust up from the ground. Then it was gone, fading away like a whisper. I went home, bewildered.

September 27 the enclosed item came out on the front page of the Daily Oklahoman. I jumped into my car and drove over to the west side of town and investigated the report. After talking to a number of people in that vicinity who had seen and heard I found that it was the same mystifying occurrence that I had witnessed on the 22nd six miles east of the city.

Ace Baker,

1628 N. E. 33rd St.,

Oklahoma City, Okla.

*The clipping sent by Mr. Baker tells of a mysterious roar which aroused the west side (of Oklahoma City). A deafening roar and clouds of dust in a field near the 3400 block on N. W. 10th. A filling station operator in the 3300 block stated that it looked like an airplane taking off, but there was none visible. He located it 100 yards from the highway. Police expressed the opinion that someone had tested an airplane motor in the field.*

*What else would they say?*

*We make no further comment, except to say that your editor and William Lawrence-Hamling personally witnessed a "weird vapor trail" in Chicago on the night of September 18. It MIGHT have been a space ship. It WASN'T anything we can understand in the light of explaining things. Northern lights, said the newspapers. The newspapers didn't see it, we did. Take your choice.—Ed.*

## THE SHAVER MYSTERY CLUB

Sirs:

With the assistance of Mr. Shaver, I have formed a new fan club called "The Shaver Mystery Club." This club has been formed with AMAZING STORIES in mind as the hub, since it was in your magazine that this incredible mystery which has so fascinated hundreds of thousands of people first saw the light of day. It has seemed

incredible to me that no group of Shaver fans has organized to try to solve the mystery, and further, to advance the many wonderful ideas Mr. Shaver's stories present, which no one can deny would vastly improve our civilization—and God knows it needs improvement today! That is why I have started this club, with Mr. Shaver's permission and approval.

I would be delighted if you would publish this letter in your "Discussions" column so that I could announce the new club to the Shaver Mystery fans and all of those readers who have been so kind as to praise my own stories in the past, and invite them to participate.

This club will not be commercial, no dues, no staff of officers, no swank. Just earnest seekers after the truth like myself and Mr. Shaver. I am preparing (with the kind assistance of Mr. Shaver as editor) a club magazine of 64 pages, intended to appear every month, containing original material such as appears in "Discussions" (that is, letters from Shaver fans, from people who have had similar experiences, and so on) plus articles on the Mystery, stories by Mr. Shaver from his "thought records" which are much too potent to appear in any newsstand magazine, and which Mr. Shaver feels are vitally important to the Mystery fans. It would be a magazine for the club members, and their letters, articles, comments would constitute its contents.

Mr. Shaver himself has contributed \$1000.00 for the expenses of the magazine and the club as his share toward advancing it. He expects no return. We think that enough membership can be obtained to pay 50c per copy (it *might* come out every month) to defray expenses.

How about it, Shaver fans? Let's do more than just TALK about the mystery. After all, we all know it's no fake by now! Write me and join!

Chester S. Geier,  
2414 Lawrence Ave.,  
Chicago 25, Illinois

*Better than that, Chet, AMAZING STORIES will help all it can. We are sending you our check for \$250.00 to help defray the expenses of the club, and any time you have an announcement to make, the columns of AMAZING STORIES are open to you. We think you've got a fine idea there!—Ed.*

## STRANGE SECRETS OF THE SEA

(Concluded from page 160)

Perhaps at sea we are very close to the great unknown. And despite the improvements in ship construction and rapid communication, vessels continue to vanish, crews continue to disappear, and unknown forces and forms of death continue to strike from out of the dark far from land.

Who or what is behind these weird and baffling occurrences? The End

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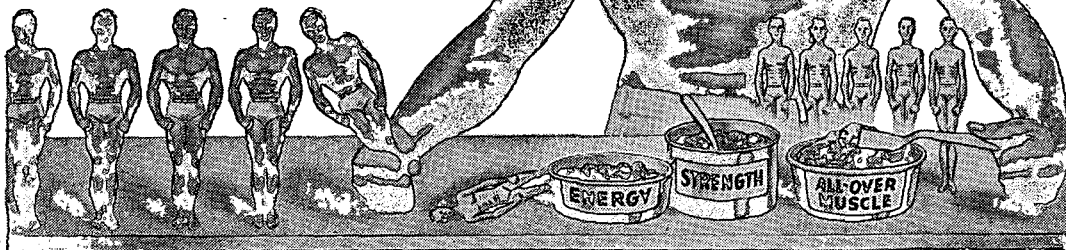


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*Charles Atlas*

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